

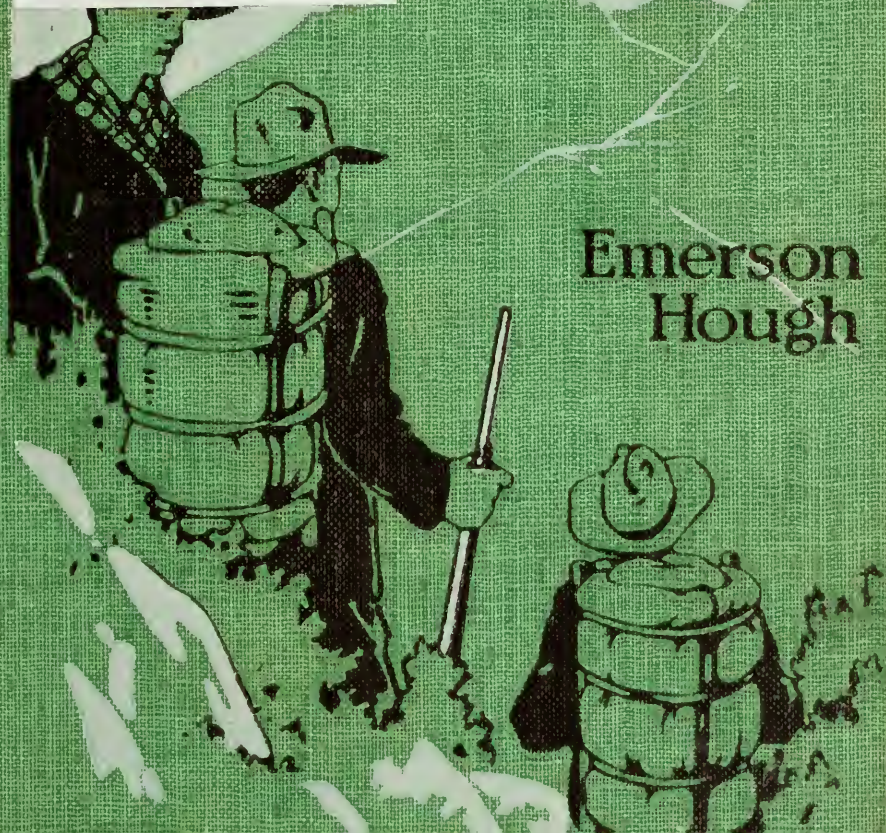
Young Alaskans In The Far North

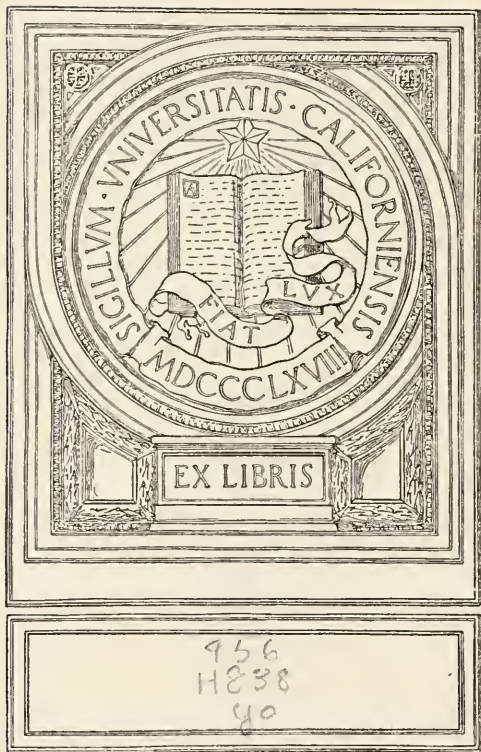
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YOUNG ALASKANS
IN THE FAR NORTH



BOOKS BY
EMERSON HOUGH

YOUNG ALASKANS IN THE FAR NORTH
THE YOUNG ALASKANS
THE YOUNG ALASKANS ON THE TRAIL
THE YOUNG ALASKANS IN THE ROCKIES

HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK
[ESTABLISHED 1817]



THE FIRST PORTAGE—SLAVE RIVER. "THE SCOWS WERE HAULED UP THE STEEP BANK BY MEANS OF BLOCK AND TACKLE."

[See page 100

YOUNG ALASKANS IN THE FAR NORTH

BY
EMERSON HOUGH

*Author of "YOUNG ALASKANS
IN THE ROCKIES" ETC.*

ILLUSTRATED



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YOUNG ALASKANS IN THE FAR NORTH

YOUNG ALASKANS IN THE FAR NORTH

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YOUNG ALASKANS
IN THE FAR NORTH

YOUNG ALASKANS IN THE FAR NORTH

I

THE START FOR THE MIDNIGHT SUN

“WELL, fellows,” said Jesse Wilcox, the youngest of the three boys who stood now at the ragged railway station of Athabasca Landing, where they had just disembarked, “here we are once more. For my part, I’m ready to start right now.”

He spoke somewhat pompously for a youth no more than fifteen years of age. John Hardy and Rob McIntyre, his two companions, somewhat older than himself, laughed at him as he sat now on his pack-bag, which had just been tossed off the baggage-car of the train that had brought them hither.

“You might wait for Uncle Dick,” said John. “He’d feel pretty bad if we started

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off now for the Arctic Circle and didn't allow him to come along!"

Rob, the older of the three, and the one to whom they were all in the habit of looking up in their wilderness journeyings, smiled at them both. He was not apt to talk very much in any case, and he seemed now content in these new surroundings to sit and observe what lay about him.

It was a straggling little settlement which they saw, with one long, broken street running through the center. There was a church spire, to be sure, and a square little wooden building in which some business men had started a bank for the sake of the coming settlers now beginning to pass through for the country along the Peace River. There were one or two stores, as the average new-comer would have called them, though each really was the post of one of the fur-trading companies then occupying that country. Most prominent of these, naturally, was the building of the ancient Hudson's Bay Company.

A rude hotel with a dirty bar full of carousing half-breeds and rowdy new-comers lay just beyond the end of the uneven railroad tracks which had been laid within the month. The surface of the low hills running back from the Athabasca River was covered with a

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stunted growth of aspens, scattered among which here and there stood the cabins or board houses of the men who had moved here following the rush of the last emigration to the North. There were a few tents and lodges of half-breeds also scattered about.

"Well, Uncle Dick said we would be starting right away," argued Jesse, a trifle crest-fallen.

"Yes," said Rob, "but he told me we would be lucky if 'right away' meant inside of a week. He said the breeds always pow-wow around and drink for a few days before they start north with the brigade for a long trip. That's a custom they have. They say the Hudson's Bay Company has more customs than customers these days. Times are changing for the fur trade even here.

"Where's your map, John?" he added; and John spread out on the platform where they stood his own rude tracing of the upper country which he had made by reference to the best government maps obtainable. Their uncle Dick, engineer of this new railroad and other frontier development enterprises, of course had a full supply of these maps, but it pleased the boys better to think that they made their own maps—as indeed they always

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had in such earlier trips as those across the Rockies, down the Peace River, in the Kadiak Island country, or along the headwaters of the Columbia, where, as has been told, they had followed the trails of the wilderness in their adventures before this time.

They all now bent over the great sheet of paper, some of which was blank and marked "Unknown."

"Here we are, right here," said John, putting his finger on the map. "Only, when this map was made there wasn't any railroad. They used to come up from Edmondton a hundred miles across the prairies and muskeg by wagon. A rotten bad journey, Uncle Dick said."

"Well, it couldn't have been much worse than the new railroad," grumbled Jesse. "It was awfully rough, and there wasn't any place to eat."

"Oh, don't condemn the new railroad too much," said Rob. "You may be glad to see it before you get back from this trip. It's going to be the hardest one we ever had. Uncle Dick says this is the last great wilderness of the world, and one less known than any other part of the earth's surface. Look here! It's two thousand miles from here to the top of the map, northwest, where the

THE START FOR THE MIDNIGHT SUN

Mackenzie comes in. We've got to get there if all goes well with us."

John was still tracing localities on the map with his forefinger. "Right here is where we are now. If we went the other way, up the Athabasca instead of down, then we would come out at the Peace River Landing, beyond Little Slave Lake. That's where we came out when we crossed the Rockies, down the Finlay and the Parsnip and the Peace. I've got that course of ours all marked in red."

"But we go the other way," began Jesse, bending over his shoulder and looking at the map now. "Here's the mouth of the Peace River, more than four hundred miles north of here, in Athabasca Lake. Both these two rivers, you might say, come together there. But look what a long river it is if you call the Athabasca and the Mackenzie the same! And look at the big lakes up there that we have read about. The Mackenzie takes you right into that country."

"The Mackenzie! One of the very greatest rivers of the world," said Rob. "I've always wanted to see it some time. And now we shall.

"I'd have liked to have been along with old Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the old trader who first explored it," he added, thoughtfully.

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"I forget just what time that was," said Jesse, hesitating and scratching his head.

"It was in seventeen eighty-nine," said Rob, always accurate. "He was only a young Scotchman then, and they didn't call him Sir Alexander at all until a good while later—after he had made some of his great discoveries. He put up the first post on Lake Athabasca—right here where our river discharges—and he went from there to the mouth of the Mackenzie River and back all in one season."

"How did they travel?" demanded John. "They must have had nothing better than canoes."

"Nothing else," nodded Rob, "for they could have had nothing else. They just had birch-bark canoes, too, not as good as white men take into that country now. There were only six white men in the party, with a few Indians. They left Athabasca Lake—here it is on the map—on June third, and they got to the mouth of the great river in forty days. That certainly must have been traveling pretty fast! It was more than fifteen hundred miles—almost sixteen hundred. But they got back to Athabasca Lake in one hundred and two days, covering over three thousand miles down-stream and up-stream.

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Well, we've all traveled enough in these strong rivers to know how hard it is to go back up-stream, whether with the tracking-line or the paddle or the sail. They did it."

"And now we're here to see what it was that they did," said Jesse, looking with some respect at the ragged line on the map which marked the strong course of the Mackenzie River toward the Arctic Sea.

"He must have been quite a man, old Alexander Mackenzie," John added.

"Yes," said Rob. "As you know, he came back to Athabasca and started up the Peace River in seventeen ninety-three, and was the first man to cross to the Pacific. We studied him over in there. But he went up-stream there, and we came down. That's much easier. It will be easier going down this river, too, which was his first great exploration place.

"Now," he continued, "we'll be going down-stream, as I said, almost two thousand miles to the mouth of that river. Uncle Dick says we'll be comfortable as princes all the way. We'll have big scows to travel in, with everything fixed up fine."

"Here," said Jesse, putting his finger on the map hesitatingly, "is the place where it says 'rapids.' Must be over a hundred miles of it on this river, or even more."

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"That's right, Jess," commented John. "We can't dodge those rapids yet. Uncle Dick says that the new railroad in the North may go to Fort McMurray at the foot of this great system of the Athabasca rapids. That would cut out a lot of hard work. If there were a railroad up there, a fellow could go to the Arctics almost as easy as going to New York."

"I'd rather go to the Midnight Sun now," said Rob. "There's some trouble about it now, and there's some wilderness now between here and there. It's no fun to do a thing when it's too easy. I wouldn't give a cent to go to Fort McPherson, the last post north, by any railroad."

John was still poring over the map, which lay upon the rude boards of the platform, and he shook his head now somewhat dubiously. "Look where we'll have to go," he said, "and all in three months. We have to get back for school next fall."

"Never doubt we can do it," said Rob, stoutly. "If we couldn't, Uncle Dick would never try it. He's got it all figured out, you may be sure of that, and he's made all his arrangements with the Hudson's Bay Company. You forget they've been going up into this country for a hundred years, and they know

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how long it takes and how hard it is. They know all about how to outfit for it, too."

"The hardest place we'll have," said John, following his map with his finger now almost to the upper edge, "is right here where we leave the Mackenzie and start over toward the Yukon, just south of the Arctic Ocean. That's a whizzer, all right! No railroad up in there, and I guess there never will be. That's where so many of the Klondikers were lost, my father told me—twenty years ago that was."

"They took a year for it," commented Rob, "and sometimes eighteen months, to get across the mountains there. They built houses and passed the winter, and so a great many of them got sick and died. But twenty years ago is a long time nowadays. We can do easily what they could hardly do at all. Uncle Dick has allowed us about three weeks to cover that five hundred miles over the Rat Portage!"

"Well, surely if Sir Alexander Mackenzie could make that trip in birch-bark canoes, over three thousand miles, with just a few men who didn't know where they were going, we ought to be able to get through now. That was a hundred and twenty-eight years ago, I figure it, and a lot of things have happened since then." John spoke now with considerable confidence.

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"Well, Uncle Dick will take care of us," said Jesse, the youngest of these adventurers.

"Yes, and we'll take care of ourselves all we can," added Rob. "Uncle Dick tells me that the trouble with the Klondikers was that they didn't know how to take care of themselves out of doors. A lot of them were city people fresh to all kinds of wilderness work, and they simply died because they didn't know how to do things. They were tenderfeet when they started. A good many of them died before they got through. Some of those who did get through are the prominent men of Alaska to-day. But we're not tenderfeet. Are we, boys?"

"No, indeed," said Jesse, stoutly. "As I said, I'm ready to start." And he again puffed out his chest with much show of bravery, although, to be sure, the wild country in which he now found himself rather worked on his imagination.

It had required all the persuasion of Uncle Dick, expert railway engineer in wilderness countries, to persuade the parents of these three boys to allow them to accompany him on this, his own first exploration into the extreme North, under the Midnight Sun itself. He had promised them—and something of a promise it was, too—to bring the young

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travelers back safely to their home in Valdez, on the Pacific Ocean, in three months from the time they left the head of the railroad at Athabasca Landing.

"Well, now," said John, folding up his map and putting it back in his pocket, "here comes Uncle Dick at last. I only hope that we won't have to wait long, for it seems to me we'll have to hustle if we get through on time—over five thousand miles it will be, and in less than ninety days! I'll bet Sir Alexander Mackenzie himself couldn't have beat that a hundred years ago."

II

THE SCOWS

“WELL, well, young gentlemen,” called out the tall and bronze-faced man who now strode toward them across the railway platform, “did you think I was never coming? I see that you are holding down your luggage.”

“Not a hard thing to do, was it, Uncle Dick?” said Jesse. “We haven’t got very much along.”

“That all depends. Let me tell you, my young friends, on this trip every fellow has to look out for himself the best he can. It’s the hardest travel you’ve ever had. You must keep your eye on your own stuff all along.”

“What do you mean—that we must be careful or some one will steal our things?” demanded Jesse.

“No, there isn’t so very much danger of theft—that is, from the breeds or others along the way; they’ll steal whisky, but nothing

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else, usually. But it's a rough country, and there are many portages, much changing of cargoes. Each chap must keep his eye on his own kit all the time, and look out for himself the best way he can. That's the lesson of this great North. It's the roughest country in the world. As you know, there is an old saying among the fur-traders that no man has ever whipped the North.

"I was thinking more especially about the dogs," he added, nodding toward the luggage on which the boys were sitting.

"And what do you mean about the dogs, Uncle Dick?" asked Jesse.

"Well, those are the beggars that will steal you blind. They'll eat anything they can swallow and some things they can't. I've had them eat the heels off a pair of boots, and moccasins are like pie for them. They would eat your hat if you left it lying—eat the pack-straps off your bag. So don't leave anything lying around, and remember that goes now, and all the way through the trip."

"Are there dogs all the way through?" asked John, curiously.

"Yes, we're in the dog country, and will be for five thousand miles down one river and across and up the other. You'll not see a cow or a sheep, and only two horses, in the

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next three months. North of Smith's Landing, which is at the head of the Mackenzie River proper, there never has been a horse, and I think there never will be one. The dogs do all the hauling and all the packing—and they are always hungry. That's what the fellows tell me who have been up there—the whole country starves almost the year round, and the dogs worst of all. I'm just telling you these things to be useful to you, because we've got nothing along which we can afford to spare."

"When are we going to start, Uncle Dick?" demanded Jesse, once more, somewhat mindful of the recent laughter of his companions at his eagerness.

"Well, that's hard to say," replied his elder relative. "I'd like to start to-morrow morning. It all depends on the stage of the water. If a flood came down the Athabasca to-morrow you'd see pretty much every breed in that saloon over there stop drinking and hurry to the scows."

"What's that got to do with it?" asked John.

"Well, when the river goes up the scows can run the Grand Rapids, down below here, without unloading, or at least without unloading everything. If the river is low so that the

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rocks stand out, the men have to portage every pound of the brigade stuff. The Grand Rapids are *bad*, let me tell you that! It is only within the last fifty years that any one has ever tried to run them. I'll show you the man who first went through—an old man now over seventy; but he was a young chap when he first tried it. Well, he found that he could get through, so he tried it over again. He and others have been guiding on those rapids ever since. That cuts off the old Clearwater trail from here to Fort McMurray, which used to be their old way of getting north.

"So now you see," he continued, "why these breeds like high water. It means less work for them. It's hard work for them at best, but a breed would rather risk his life than do any work he could escape. They know there is danger — there is hardly a brigade goes north which brings back all its men again.

"But come on now," he added. "It's almost time for supper. We'll go fix up our camp for the night."

The boys, each stoutly picking up his own pack-bag, followed their tall leader as he strode away. Their camp was far enough removed from the noise of the hotel bar to leave them in quiet and undisturbed.

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"My, but the mosquitoes are thick!" said Jesse, brushing at his face with the broken bough which he had caught up. "I never saw them so bad."

"Well, Jesse," said Uncle Dick, smiling, "just you wait. Before you get back you'll say you never saw mosquitoes before in your life. The traders tell me that they are worse the farther north you go. They say it takes about two or three years for a new man to get used to them so that he can sleep or work at his best—it's a sort of nervousness that they stir up, though in time that wears off. I think also when they keep on biting you you get immune to the poison, so that it doesn't hurt so much."

"Don't they bite the half-breeds and Indians?" asked John.

"Certainly they bite them. You watch the breeds around a camp at night. Every fellow will cover up his head with his blanket, so that he can sleep or smother, as it happens. As for us, however, we've got our black headnets and our long-sleeved gloves. Dope isn't much good. No one cares much for mosquito dope in the Far North; you'll see more of it in the States than you will in here, because they have learned that it is more or less useless.

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"Our big mosquito tent is just the same as the one we took down the Columbia River with us—the one that the Indians cut the end out of when we gave it to them! I've tried that tent all through Alaska in my work, and everywhere in this part of the world, and it's the only thing for mosquitoes. You crawl in through the little sleeve and tie it after you get inside, and then kill the mosquitoes that have followed you in. The windows allow you to get fresh air, and the floor cloth sewed in keeps the mosquitoes from coming up from below. It's the only protection in the world."

"But I saw a lot of little tents or bars down in the camp near the river a little while ago," said Rob.

"Precisely. That's the other answer to the mosquito question—the individual mosquito bar-tent. They are regularly made and sold in all this northern country now, and mighty useful they are, too. As you see, it's just a piece of canvas about six feet long and one breadth wide, with mosquito bar sewed to the edges. You tie up each corner to a tree or stick, and let the bar of cheese-cloth drop down around your bed, which you make on the ground. When you lie down you tuck the edge under your blankets, and there you are! If you don't roll about very much you are

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fairly safe from mosquitoes. That, let me say, is the typical individual remedy for mosquitoes in this country. Of course, when we are out on railroad work, map-making and writing and the like, we have to have something bigger and better than that. That sort of little tent is only for the single night. No doubt we'll use them ourselves, traveling along on the scows, because it is a good deal of trouble to put up a big wall tent every night.

"The distances in this country are so big," he added, after a time, explaining, "that every one travels in a hurry and spends no unnecessary work in making camp. We'll have to learn to break camp in ten minutes, and to make it in fifteen. I should say it would take us about thirty minutes to make a landing, build a fire, cook a meal, and get off again. There's no time to be wasted, don't you see?"

"I suppose Sir Alexander Mackenzie found that out himself when he first went down this river," said Rob.

"I'll warrant you he did! And his lesson has stuck in the minds of all these northern people to this day."

"Well, anyhow," commented Jesse, as one mosquito bit his hand, "I wish they wouldn't bother me while I'm eating."

THE SCOWS

"Now if John had said that," said Uncle Dick, "it wouldn't be so strange."

They all joined in his laughing at John, whose appetite made a standing joke among them. But John only laughed with them and went on with his supper. "There can't anybody bluff me out of a good meal," said he, "not even the mosquitoes."

"That's the idea," nodded his older adviser. "But really these insect pests are the great drawback of this entire northern country. Perhaps they will keep the settlers out as much as anything else. Fur-traders and trappers and travelers like ourselves—they can't stop for them, of course. We'll take our chances like Sir Alexander Mackenzie—eh, boys?"

"I'm not afraid," said Jesse.

"Nor I," added John.

And indeed they finished their evening meal, which they cooked for themselves, in fairly comfortable surroundings; and in their mosquito-proof tent they passed an untroubled night, each in the morning declaring that he had slept in perfect comfort.

"We'll leave the tents standing for a while," said Uncle Dick, "until we know just when we are going to embark. The brigade may pull out any day now. We'll have warning

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enough so that we can easily get ready. But come on now and we'll go over to the boat-yard," he added. "It's time we began to see about our own boat and to get our supplies ready for shipping."

They followed him through the straggling town down to the edge of the water-front, where the Athabasca, now somewhat turbulent in the high waters of the spring, rolled rapidly by.

Here there was a rude sort of lumber-yard, to all appearance, with the addition of a sort of rough shipyard. Chips and shavings and fragments of boards lay all about. Here and there on trestles stood the gaunt frames of what appeared to be rough flatboats, long, wide, and shallow, constructed with no great art or care. There was no keel to any one of these boats, and the ribs were flimsily put together.

"Well, I don't think much of these boats," grumbled John, as he passed among them slowly.

"Don't be too rough with them," said Uncle Dick, laughingly. "Like everything else up here, they may not be the best in the world, but they do for their purpose. These scows are never intended to come back, you must remember; all they have to do is to

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stand the trip down, for a month or two. All the frame houses of the Far North are made out of these scows; they break them up at the ends of the trips. Our boat may be part of a church before it gets through.

"Come now, and I'll introduce you to old Adam McAdam, the builder and pump-maker." He nodded toward an old man who was passing slowly here and there among the rude craft. "This old chap is no doubt over seventy-five years old, and he must have built hundreds of these boats in his time. He makes the pumps, too, and a pump has to go with every scow to keep it from sinking at first, before the seams get swelled up."

The old man proved pleasant enough, and with a certain pride showed them all about these rude craft of the fur trade. Each boat appeared to be about fifty feet in length and nearly twenty in width, the carrying capacity of each being about ten tons.

"Of course you know, my lads," said the old man, "a scow goes no faster than the river runs. Here's the great oar—twenty feet it is in length—made out of a young tree. The steersman uses that to straighten her up betimes. But there's nothing to make the boat run saving the current, do ye mind?"

"Well, that won't be so very fast," com-

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mented Rob, thinking of the long distances that lay ahead.

"Oh, we're not confined to scows for much more than two hundred and fifty miles," replied Uncle Dick. "At McMurray we get a steamer which carries us down-stream to Smith's Landing. That's the big and bad portage of the whole trip—that is to say, excepting the Rat Portage of five hundred miles over the Yukon. But when we get below the Smith's Landing portage we strike another Hudson's Bay Company steamer that takes us fast enough, day and night, all the way to the Arctic Circle. That's where we make our time, don't you see? These boats only get us over the rapids.

"Of course," he explained, a little later, "a few of them go on down, towed by the steamboats, because the steamboats are not big enough to carry all the freight which must go north. There are only two steamboats between us and the Arctic Circle now, barring one or two little ones which are not of much account. The scows have to carry all the supplies for the entire fur trade—trade goods, bacon, flour, and everything."

"Who's that old gentleman coming along there, Uncle Dick?" demanded Jesse, turning toward the end of the street.

THE SCOWS

"That's old Father Le Fèvre," replied his uncle. "He's the purchasing agent for all the many missions of the Catholic Church in the Far North. Each year he comes in with ten or more scows, each carrying ten tons of goods. He may go as far as Chippewyan, and then come back, or he may go on to Great Slave. I understand there are two good Sisters going even farther north this year. No one knows when they will come back, of course; they'll be teachers up among the native schools.

"Well, now you see the transport system beyond the head of the rails in the Athabasca and Mackenzie country," he continued, as, hands in pocket, he passed along among the finished and unfinished craft which still lay in the shipyard.

Outside, moored to stumps along the shore, floated a number of the rude scows, some of which even now were partially laden. The leader of the expedition pointed out to one of these.

"That's our boat yonder, young men," said he. "You'll see that she has the distinction of a name. Most scows have only numbers on them, and each post gets certain scows with certain numbers. But ours has a name—the *Midnight Sun*. How do you like that?"

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"That's fine, sir!" said Rob. "And we'll see to it that she doesn't come to grief as long as we use her."

"Well, it will only be for a couple of hundred miles or so," said Uncle Dick, "but I fancy there'll be nothing slow in that two hundred miles."

"Where will we eat?" demanded John, with his usual regard for creature comforts.

"That's easy," said Rob. "I know all about that. I saw two men loading a cook-stove on one of the scows. They took it out of a canoe, and how they did it without upsetting the canoe I can't tell, but they did it. I suppose we'll cook as we go along."

"Precisely," nodded Uncle Dick. "The cook-boat is the only thing that goes under steam. The cook builds his fire in the stove just as though he were on shore. When he calls time for meals, the men from the other boats take turns in putting out in canoes and going to the cook-boat for meals. Sometimes a landing is made while they eat, and of course they always tie up at night. They have certain stages which they try to make. The whole thing is all planned out on a pretty good system, rough but effective, as you will see."

"Is he a pretty good cook?" asked John, somewhat demurring.

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"Well, good enough for us, if he is good enough for the others," replied his uncle. "But I'll tell you what we might do once in a while. They do say that the two good Sisters who go north with the mission brigade know how to cook better than any half-breed. I've made arrangements so that we can eat on their scow once in a while if we like."

"What's that funny business on the end of our boat?" asked Jesse, presently, pointing to a rude framework of bent poles which covered the short deck at the stern of the boat.

"That's what they call a 'bower' up in this country," said Uncle Dick. "They have some curious old English words in here, even yet. Now a bower is simply a lot of poles, like an Indian wickiup, covering the end of your boat, as you see. You can throw your blankets over it, if you like, or green willows. It keeps the sun off. Since the Hudson's Bay Company charges a pretty stiff price for taking any passenger north, it tries to earn its money by building a bower for the select few, such as we are."

"I don't think that we need any bower," said Rob, and all the other boys shook their heads.

"A little sunshine won't hurt us," said Jesse, stoutly.

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"But think of the style about it," laughed Uncle Dick, pleased to see the hardness of his young charges. "Well, we'll do as we like about that. One thing, we've got to have a chance to see out, for I know you will want to keep your eyes open every foot of the way."

"Well, I wish the breeds would hurry up and get the boats loaded," added Jesse, impatiently, after a while. "There's nothing doing here worth while."

"Don't be too hard with the breeds," counseled Uncle Dick. "They're like children, that's all. This is the best time of the year for them, when the great fur brigade goes north. It couldn't go without them. The fur trade in this country couldn't exist without the half-breeds and the full-bloods; there's a half-dozen tribes on whom the revenues of this great corporation depend absolutely."

"You'll see now the best water-men and the best trail-men in the world. Look at these packages—a hundred pounds or better in each. Every pound of all that stuff is to be portaged across the Smith's Landing portage, and the Mountain Portage, and even at Grand Island, just below here, if the water is low. They have to carry it up from the scows to the steamboats, and from the steamboats to the shore. Every pound is handled again and

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again. It's the half-breeds that do that. They're as strong as horses and as patient as dogs; fine men they are, so you must let them have their little fling after their old ways; they don't know any better."

"How many of the fur posts are there in the North, Uncle Dick?" asked Rob, curious always to be exact in all his information.

"Well, let's see," pondered Uncle Dick, holding up his fingers and counting them off. "The first one above here is McMurray; that's one of the treaty posts where the tribes are paid their annuities by the Dominion government. It's two hundred and fifty-two miles from here, and there's where we hit our first steamboat, as I told you.

"Then comes Chippewyan, on Athabasca Lake. It was founded by Sir Alexander Mackenzie in seventeen eighty-eight, and from that time on it has been one of the most important trading-posts of the North—in fact, I believe it is the most important to-day, as it seems to be a sort of center, right where a lot of rivers converge. That's four hundred and thirty-seven miles from here. When you get that far in, my buckos, you'll be able to say that you are away from the hated pale-faces and fairly launched on your trip through the wildest wilderness the world has to-day. It

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is a hundred miles on to Smith's Landing—sixteen miles there of the fiercest water you ever saw in all your lives. Wagon portage there, but sometimes the boats go through. Fort Smith is at the other end of that portage.

"Next down is Fort Resolution, and that's seven hundred and forty-five miles from here. Hay River is eight hundred and fifteen, and Fort Providence nine hundred and five miles, and Fort Simpson, at the mouth of the Liard River, is a thousand and eighty-five miles from here. Getting along in the world pretty well then, eh?

"There are a few others as I recall them—Fort Wrigley, twelve hundred and sixty-five miles from here, and Fort Norman, fourteen hundred and thirty-seven miles. Now you come to Fort Good Hope, and that is right under the Arctic Circle. It is sixteen hundred and nine miles from here, where we are at the head of the railroads. If we are fast enough in our journey we'll get our first sight of the Midnight Sun at Good Hope, perhaps.

"The next post north of Good Hope is Arctic Red River, eighteen hundred and nineteen miles; and of course you know that the last post of the Hudson's Bay Company is Fort McPherson, on the Peel River, near the

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mouth of the Mackenzie. That is rated as eighteen hundred and nineteen miles by the government map-makers, who may or may not be right; being an engineer myself, I'll say they must be right! In round numbers we might as well call it two thousand miles.

"Well, that's your distance, young men, and here are the ships which are to carry you part of the way."

"And when we get to Fort McPherson we're not half-way through, are we, sir?" asked Rob.

"No, we're not, and if we were starting a hundred and twenty-eight years earlier than we are, with Sir Alexander Mackenzie, we would have to hustle to get back before the snows caught us. As it is, we'll hope some time in July to start across the Rat Portage. That's five hundred miles, just along the Arctic Circle, and in that five hundred miles we go from Canadian into American territory—at Rampart House, on the Porcupine River. Well, it's down-stream from there to the Yukon, and then we hit our own boats—more of them, and faster and more comfortable. I have no doubt, John, that you can get all you want to eat on any one of a half-dozen good boats that ply on the Yukon to-day from White Horse down to the mouth.

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"Of course," he added, "this trip of ours is not quite as rough as it would have been twenty years ago when the Klondike rush began. The world has moved since then, as it always has moved and always will. I suppose some time white men will live in a good deal of this country which we now think impossible for a white man to inhabit. Little by little, as they learn the ways of the Indians and half-breeds, they will edge north, changing things as they go.

"But I don't want to talk about those times," he added, shrugging his shoulders. "I'm for the wilderness as it is, and I'm glad that you three boys and myself can see that country up there before it has changed too much. Not that it is any country for a tenderfoot now. You'll find it wild enough and rough enough. It has gone back since the Klondike rush. In travel you'll see the old ways of the Hudson's Bay Company, even although the independents have cut into their trade a little bit. You'll see the Far North much as it was when Sir Alexander first went down our river here.

"And as you go on I want you to study the old times, and the new times as well. That's the way, boys, to learn things. As for me, I found out long ago that the only way to learn

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about a country is not to look it up on a map, but to tramp across it in your moccasins.

“So now,” he concluded, as they four stood at the river’s brink, looking out at the long line of the scows swinging in the rapid current of the Athabasca, “that’s the first lesson. What do you think of our boat, the *Midnight Sun*?”

“She’s fine, sir!” said Rob, and the other boys, eagerly looking up into the face of their tall and self-reliant leader, showed plainly enough their enjoyment of the prospect and their confidence in their ability to meet what might be on ahead.

III

THE GREAT BRIGADE

“**R**OLL out! Roll out!” called the cheery voice of Uncle Dick on the second morning of the stay at Athabasca Landing.

“Aye, aye, sir!” came three young voices in reply. The young adventurers kicked off their blankets and one by one emerged through the sleeve of the mosquito tent.

“What made you call us so early?” complained Jesse. “It’s raining—it began in the night—and it doesn’t look as if it were going to stop.”

“Well, that’s the very good news we’ve been waiting for!” said Uncle Dick. “It’s been raining somewhere else as well as here. Look at the river—muddy and rising! That means that things will begin to happen in these diggings pretty soon now.”

For experienced campers such as these to prepare breakfast in the rain was no great task, and they hurriedly concluded their

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preliminary packing. It was yet early in the day when they stood on the river-bank, looking at the great fleet of scows of the north-bound fur brigade as the boats now lay swinging in the stiffening current.

The river was indeed rising; the snow to the west was melting in the rains of spring. Time now for the annual fur brigade to be off!

At the river front already there had gathered most of the motley population of the place. Everything now was activity. Each man seemed to know his work and to be busy about it. The Company manager had general charge over the embarkation of the cargo, and certainly the men under him were willing workers.

A long line of men passed over the narrow planks which lay between the warehouses and across the muddy flats to the deep water where the boats lay. Each man carried on his shoulders a load which would have staggered the ordinary porter. All went at a sort of trot, so that the cargo was being moved rapidly indeed. It was obvious that these half-breeds, but now so lazy and roistering, were very able indeed when it came to the matter of work, and easy to see that they were, as Uncle Dick had said, the backbone of the fur trade of the North.

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One after another a young half-breed would come hurrying down the street, his hair close cut and his face well washed, wearing all the finery for which he had been able to get credit, now that he had a prospect of wages coming in ere long. The resident population joined those idling about the warehouses and the boat-yard, for this was the greatest event of the year for them, with one exception—that is, the return of the much smaller brigade bearing the fur down from the northern country. This would come in the fall. Now it was spring, and the great fur brigade of the Company was starting north on its savage annual journey.

Here and there among these were strange faces also to be of the north-bound company now embarking. Good Father Le Fèvre passed among them all, speaking to this or that man of the half-breeds pleasantly, they having each a greeting for him in turn. This was by no means his first trip with the brigade, and hundreds of the natives knew him.

The boys stood wondering at the enormous loads which these men carried from the warehouses out to the boats. Here a man might have on his back a great slab of side-meat weighing more than a hundred and fifty pounds, and on top of that a sack of flour or

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so. It was not unusual to see a slight young chap carrying a load of two or three hundred pounds, and some of the older and more powerful men engaged in a proud sort of rivalry among themselves, shouldering and carrying out literally enormous loads. It was said of one of these men that he once had carried a cook-stove weighing five hundred pounds on his back from the boat landing up the hill to one of the posts, a distance of many hundred yards.

"Well, at this rate," said Rob, after a time, "it won't take long before we'll be loaded and on our way. These men are simply wonders. Aren't they?"

Uncle Dick nodded his quiet assent.

"Our boat's getting loaded, too," said Jesse, pointing to where the *Midnight Sun* stood swinging in the current. "Look at them fill her up."

It was true; the factor in charge of the embarkation-work was checking out the cargo for each boat. Each scow had its number, and that number was credited to a certain fur-post along the great route to the mouth of the Mackenzie River. The supplies intended for each boat, therefore, went into the proper boats. All the cargo intended for Uncle Dick's party was marked in black, "M. S.,"

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in courtesy to the name of this boat, the *Midnight Sun*, which carried no number at all.

"We'll not go as heavily loaded as some of the others," Uncle Dick explained, "although it is only courteous that we should take all we can, since transportation is so hard. We need only enough to take us to the mouth of the river and over the Rat Portage to the Yukon. Of course we'll forget all about our boat when we get below the rapids, but they'll tow her down alongside the steamer.

"I have told you," he went on, "that this is a starving country. Now you can see why. They can't possibly carry into that far-away region as much stuff as they need to eat and to wear. The Company does the best it can, and so do all these mission men do the best they can.

"Now you see how the brigade goes north—not in birch-bark canoes, but in scows, to-day. The scow has even taken the place of the old York boat. That was the boat which they formerly used on the Saskatchewan and some of these rivers for their up-stream work. It's a good deal like a Mackinaw boat. You'll see here, too, one or two scows with blunt ends, such as they call the "sturgeon" nose. They tow a little easier than the square-

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ended scow. But these new square-facers are the best things in the world for going downstream with the current."

"Hadn't we better get our packs ready?" asked Rob, methodical as ever.

"Yes," replied their leader, "you ought to get the bed rolls made up and the tent in its bag before very long. I don't think we'll be started a great while before sundown, but we'll get ready."

"It's enough to get ready," he continued. "Don't carry your own stuff down to the boats."

"Why not?" asked John, curiously. "We can do it easily enough."

"Well, you're in another sort of country now," said Uncle Dick to him, quietly. "Follow customs of the country. You must remember that the Hudson's Bay Company is a very old monopoly, and it has its own ways. Always it treats the natives as though they were children and it was the Great Father. A factor is a sort of king up here. He wouldn't think of carrying a pound of his own luggage for anything in the world. If he began that sort of thing the natives would not respect him as their *bourgeois*."

"*Bourgeois*? What does that mean?" asked John, again.

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"Well, about the same as boss, I suppose. It's always necessary in dealing with ignorant and savage peoples to take the attitude that you are the boss, and that they are to do what you tell them. If you get too familiar or lower yourself too much with primitive people, they don't respect you, because they think you're afraid of them.

"Now, that has always been the custom of the Hudson's Bay Company in this work. In the old days, when things were more autocratic, when a factor went on a journey his people picked him up and carried him into his boat, and when he went ashore they picked him up and carried him out again. If anybody got wet or tired or hungry be sure it wasn't the boss!

"You see, young gentlemen, while I don't want you, of all things in the world, ever to be snobbish, I do want you to be observant. So just take this advice from me, and let these men do your work right at the start. They expect it, and they will treat you all the better—and of course you will treat them well."

"Who is that old pirate standing over there by the boat landing?" asked Jesse, presently, pointing to a tall, dark, and sinewy man with full black beard, who seemed to have a certain authority among the laborers.

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"That's Cap. Shott. I've told you that he was the first man who ever ran the Grand Rapids of the Athabasca River. His real name is Louis Faisoneure. He's seventy-seven years old, but still he likes to go down with the brigade, part way at least.

"The quiet young man just beyond him is his son, François. He is the real captain—or commodore, as they call it—of the brigade, and has been for several years. He'll be the steersman on our boat, so that in one way you might say that the *Midnight Sun*, although not a Company boat, will pretty much be the flag-ship of the brigade this year. They're treating us as well as they know how, and I must say we'll have no cause to complain."

"Cap. Shott," as they nicknamed him, did indeed have a piratical look, as John had said. He stood more than six and a half feet in his moccasins, and was straight as an arrow, with the waist of a boy. His face was dark, his eyebrows very heavy and black, and his dark, full beard, his scant trousers held up with a brilliant scarf, and his generally ferocious appearance, gave him a peculiarly wild and outlandish look, although personally he was gentle as a child.

"Well, Cap. Shott," said Uncle Dick, approaching him, "we start to-day, eh?"

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"Mebbe so, *oui*," replied the old man. "We load h'all the boats bimeby now. Yes, pretty soon bimeby we start, mebbe so, *oui*."

"Well," said Uncle Dick, smiling, as he turned to the boys, "that's about as definite as you can get anything. We'll start when we start! Just get your stuff ready to be embarked and tell the manager where it is. It will be on board all right."

"But what makes them start so late in the day?" demanded John, who was of an investigative turn of mind. "I should think the morning was the right time to start."

"Not so the great fur brigade," was his answer. "Nor was it the custom in the great fur brigades which went out with pack-trains from the Missouri in our own old days when there were buffalo and beaver. A short start was made on the first day, usually toward evening. Then when camp was made everything was overhauled, and if anything had been left behind it was not too far to send back to get it. Nearly always it was found that something had been overlooked."

"Now that's the way we'll do here, so they tell me. We'll run down the river a few miles, each boat as it is loaded, and then we'll make a landing. That will give each boat captain time to look over his stuff and his men—and,

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what is more, it will give each man time to run in across country and get a few last drinks. Some of them will come back to be confessed by their priest. Some will want to send supplies to their families who are left behind. On one excuse or another every man of the brigade will be back here in town to-night if we should start! Of course by to-morrow morning they'll be on hand again bright and early and ready for the voyage. You see, there are customs up here with which we have not been acquainted before."

It came out precisely as Uncle Dick had said. Very late in the afternoon—late by the clock, though not so late by the sun, which at this latitude sank very late in the west—there came a great shouting and outcry, followed by firing of guns, much as though a battle were in progress. Men, hurrying and crying excitedly as they ran, went aboard the boats. One after another the mooring-ropes were cast off. The poles and oars did their work, and slowly, piecemeal, but in a vast aggregate, the great Mackenzie brigade was on its way!

The first boat of the fleet, as had been predicted, ran no more than three or four miles before it pulled ashore at a landing-place which seemed well known to all. Here the

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scows came in slowly and clumsily, but without disorder and without damage, until the entire bank for a half-mile was turned into a sort of shipyard of its own.

Here and there men were working the little wooden pumps, because for the first day or two the scows were sure to leak.

The boys made their own camp that night aboard the boat. At each end was a short deck, and that in the rear offered space for their blanket beds. Rob undertook to sleep on top of the cargo under the edge of the great tarpaulin which covered all. They had their little Yukon stove, which accompanied them, and on the front deck, where a box of earth had been provided, they set this up and did their own cooking, as they preferred.

In the morning Father Le Fèvre paddled over to them in a canoe from his own scow.

"*Bon jour*, gentlemen!" said he. "I called to ask you if you would not like to have breakfast with us. Sister Eloise is known for her skill in cookery."

The leader of our little party accepted with great cheerfulness, so that they all climbed into the canoe, and presently were alongside the mission scow. All over the great fleet of scows everything now was silent. Each boat

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had its watchman, but he alone, of all the crew, had remained aboard.

"My poor children!" said Father Le Fèvre, smiling as he looked about him. "They indeed are like children. Presently they will come. Then we shall see."

Our young travelers now became acquainted with yet others of the north-bound party. Sister Eloise, stout and good-natured, proved herself all that had been promised as a cook.

"Yes, yes, she has gone north before," said the good Father. "But always she has fear of the water. When we go on the rapids Sister Eloise knits or tells her beads or reads—very hard indeed she reads or knits or prays! She is afraid, but does not like me to know it," and his eye twinkled as he spoke.

"Sister Vincent de Paul goes north for the first time," he said, smiling now at the other of the gray-habited nuns who found themselves in these strange surroundings. "She is called to Fort Resolution, and may stay there for some years. We do not know.

"And here," he added, pulling up by the ear a swarthy little boy who seemed more Indian than white, "this we will call Charl'. We are taking him back to his father, who is the factor at Resolution. His mother is native woman, as you see, and this boy has

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been at Montreal for two years at school. *Eh bien*, Charl', you will be good boy now? If not I shall tell your papa!

"You see," he explained to the others who now for the first time were getting some acquaintance of this mission-work, "we try to do the best we know, and to make life easier for these people in the Far North. It is a hard fortune that they have. Always they starve—never have they enough. And every year the great brigade goes north so that they may last yet another year."

Presently there came down overland to the fleet yet other men who made part of the strange, wild company. Cap. Shott, friendly and paternal in his way, brought on for introduction to the party the Dominion judge, who every year goes north to settle the legal disputes which may have arisen at the several posts for a considerable distance to the north. The judge had with him his clerk and secretary, and there was also a commissioner, as well as another official, a member of the Indian Department, who was bound north to pay the tribesmen their treaty money.

There came also the wife of a member of the Anglican Church, which, as well as the Catholic Church, has missions all along the great waterway almost to the Arctic Sea. So that,

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as may be seen, the personnel of the brigade that year was of varied and interesting composition.

All came out as Uncle Dick and Father Le Fèvre had said—by the time breakfast was over the half-breed boatmen began to come down at a trot overland from the town. Few of them had slept. All of them had been drinking most of the night. They came with their heads tied up, their eyes red, each man looking uncomfortable, but they all went aboard and made ready for their work. Father Le Fèvre shook his head as he looked at them.

"Too bad, too bad, my children!" said he, "but you will not learn, you will not learn at all. However, two days on the river and your heads will be more clear. Providence has arranged, I presume, that there shall be two or three days' travel between the landing and the Grand Rapids. Else fewer of our boats would get through!"

As the scows swung out into the river, under no motive power excepting that of the current, the men arranged themselves for the long journey, each to suit himself, but under a loose sort of system of government. At the long steering-sweep, made from a spruce pole twenty feet in length, stood always the steersman, holding the scow straight in the current.

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The ten tons of luggage was piled high in each scow, and all covered with a great tarpaulin to protect the cargo of side-meat, salt, sugar, flour, and steel traps, cloth, strouds, other rough supplies, as well as the better stock of trade goods—prints, powder, ball, rifles, matches, a scant supply of canned goods—and such other additions to the original stock as modern demands instituted by the independent traders for the most part had now made necessary in the traffic with the tribes. That year, indeed, a few hand sewing-machines went north, and some phonographs — things of wonder to the ignorant native of that far-off land.

The progress of the boats, although steady, seemed very slow, and, as there was no work to do, the men amused themselves as best they might. There were several fiddlers in the fleet, and now and then, as the *Midnight Sun* swept down, well handled by the commodore, François, they passed a scow on whose bow deck a scantily clad half-breed was dancing to the music of the violin. Now and again across the water came the curious droning song of the Cree steersmen, musical but wild.

The great brigade was off on its start for the long journey from the Rockies to the icy sea, continuing one more year of the wild

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commerce which had become a part of the land itself for more than a century now.

"It's wonderful — wonderful!" said Rob, looking about him at the strange scene on that morning of their first day of actual travel. "I've never seen a thing more fascinating than this. I'm sure this is going to be the best trip we've ever had.

"I tell you what," he added, a moment later, turning to the leader of their little party, "I believe I'll try to keep a little diary for a little while at least; it might be nice to have a few notes to refer to. I doubt if any of us will ever make this trip again."

"An excellent idea!" said his uncle. "That's the way to get your information soaked into your head. Write it down, and be careful what you write. Your notes, together with John's maps, are things you will prize very much indeed, later in life."

Rob, indeed, did fulfil his promise, beginning that very day, and perhaps a few notes taken from his diary may be of interest, as showing what actually happened as recorded by himself.

"May 29th.—Off late. Ran three miles. Men went back to town. Found sacks of sugar made a hard bed. Mosquitoes.

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"May 30th.—The grand start of the big brigade. Running maybe four or five miles an hour. Banks getting lower. Cottonwoods, some brûlée (burned-over forest). Supper 6 P.M. Ran until 9.45 P.M. Damp camp.

"May 31st.—Off at 6. In the morning men on the first boat killed a cow moose and two calves. No game laws north of 53°. Men rejoice over meat. Eight mission scows in fleet, which carry eight to ten tons each. Father Le Fèvre says, except for whitefish, all northern missions would perish. At 2.15 stopped at Pelican Portage, at head of Pelican Rapids, 120 miles below the landing. Head winds yesterday, but favorable now. Two boats collided, and one damaged. Saw two dogs carrying packs—first pack-dogs I ever saw. Priest baptized an Indian baby here. I suppose this is what the brigade goes north for, in part. Lay here until 7 in the evening, and then off for our first rapids, the Pelican. Rough, but not so bad as Columbia Big Bend Rapids. An eighteen-foot canoe would go through; twelve-foot doubtful. Scows do it easily. Fast work close to the shore part of the way. Men know their busi-

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ness. Some system to the brigade. Camp at foot of rapids. Much excitement. Scows crowding one another. Many mosquitoes.

"June 1st, Sunday.—No travel to-day. All of the boatmen are Catholics. The priest put up a little chapel and said Mass. Curious scene to see all these half-savages kneeling, hats off, on the ground. After Mass a good many of them got their hair cut; one or two men can do barbering-work. The judge and legal party played cards all the afternoon. John seems to eat more than ever. A good many mosquitoes.

"June 2d.—Off at 6, which seems regular starting-time. Ashore for lunch 11.30. Slow and lazy work floating down, but pleasant. Tied up at 6 for supper. Much excitement now, as we are coming down to the head of Grand Island, where we make the big portage. After supper made a mile or so through shallow water among many rocks, to the head of the island. It is low and rocky, covered with cottonwoods, should think about a mile long, and not over half a mile wide. Very fierce water to the left, with quiet water above. No boat ever ran the

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left channel alive. Many lost here in the Klondike; they went into that quiet and deep water on the left and got caught. They say we will try to run the right-hand side. Did not put up tent to-night, but slept under mosquito tents. A hundred and sixty-five miles from Athabasca Landing. Now we begin to feel as though we were to see the real work."

IV

THE GRAND RAPIDS

IT was much as Rob had predicted in the last entry of his diary previously quoted. Uncle Dick hurried them through their breakfast.

"We'll see some fun to-day, boys," said he.

"How do you mean?" asked Jesse. "Are they going to try to run the boats through?"

"They'll have to run the scows through light, so François tells me. There isn't water enough to take them through loaded, so practically each one will have to unship its cargo here.

"You see that wooden tramway running down the island?" He pointed toward a crooked track laid roughly on cross-ties, the rails of wood. "That is perhaps the least expensive railroad in the world, and the one which makes the most money on its capital. I don't think it cost the Company over eight hundred dollars. It couldn't be crookeder or

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worse. And yet it pays for itself each year several times over, just by the outside trade which it does!

“They built this railroad after the Klondike rush came through here. Previous to that all the goods had to be taken over the ‘short portage’—you see that place over on the steep hillside at the right side of the river—a mile and a half of it, and every pound of the Company and Klondike baggage that went north had to be carried on men’s backs along that slippery footing. It was necessary to run these rapids and to build this railroad. You will see how both ideas will work to-day.”

Some of the boats had been loaded so heavily that part of the cargo had to be left above the shallow water—one more handling of the freightage necessitated in the north-bound journey, but each boat, carrying as much as could be floated, now came poling down through the rocks to the head of the island.

The men, half in and half out of the water, began to unload this cargo and to pile it in a great heap at the head of the wooden railroad. There were two flat-cars, and rapidly these were loaded and pushed off to the foot of the island, half or three-quarters of a mile. There every pound of the baggage had to be

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unloaded once more, and after that once more carried from the landing into the boats at the foot of the island.

"Well, are they going to take the boats down on the cars, too?" demanded Jesse.

"They have done that for others," answered Uncle Dick, "and charged them ten dollars a boat for doing it, too. But as I said, we'll have to run our scows down on the right-hand passage. That's the fun I was talking about."

Rob came up to him now excitedly. "Tell me, Uncle Dick, can't I go through—couldn't I go through with you in the very first boat?"

His uncle looked at him for a time soberly before he replied. "Well, I don't like to mollycoddle any of you," said he, "but I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll have to leave John and Jesse here on the island. If François says it's safe I'll let you go through with me on the first boat. It's no place for us to be in this country if we're going to sidestep every little bit of risk there is. That isn't a manly thing to do. But the other two boys will have to wait for a while.

"There's bad news," he said to Rob, a little later, aside. "Word has just come up by canoe from the Long Rapids below here that four men were drowned day before yesterday. They were going down to Mc-

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Murray, and although they had a native pilot they got overturned in the rapids and couldn't get out. The Mounted Police are looking for the bodies now."

It was with rather sober faces that our young travelers now watched the boatmen at their portage-work, although the latter themselves were cheerful as always, and engaged, as before, in friendly rivalry in feats of strength. Everything was confusion, yet there was a sort of system in it, after all, for each man was busy throughout the long hours of the day. As a scow came in its cargo was rapidly taken out, as rapidly piled up ashore, and quite as rapidly flung on top of the flat-cars for transport across the great portage.

Our young adventurers saw with interest that a good many of the boatmen were quite young, boys of fifteen, sixteen, and eighteen years of age. Some of these latter did the full work of a man, and one slight chap of seventeen, with three sacks of flour, and another youth of his own weight on top of it all, stood for a time supporting a staggering weight of several hundred pounds while Jesse fumbled with his camera to make a picture of him.

At about eleven o'clock in the morning of the second day Uncle Dick came to Rob and drew him aside.

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"The first boat is going through," said he. "François will take it down. It's a Company scow with about a quarter of its cargo left in. Cap. Shott says it is all right. Are you still of a mind to go, or do you want to stay here?"

"Not at all, sir!" rejoined Rob, stoutly. "I'll go through, of course."

So presently they both stepped into the lightly loaded scow which lay at the head of the island. The men consisted of the steersman, François; a bowman, Pierre; and four oarsmen. They all were stripped to trousers and shirts. At a word from François the boat pushed out, the men poling it through the maze of rocks at the head of the island to a certain point at the head of the right-hand channel where the current steadied down over a wide and rather open piece of water.

The bowman carried in his hand a long lance-like shaft or pole, and stood with it upon the short bow deck. At the stern of the boat there was a plank laid across which acted as a bridge for the commodore, François, who walked back and forward across it as he worked his great steering-oar, which ran out at the back of the scow.

If the men had any anxiety about their undertaking, they did not show it. François smoked calmly. It was to be noted that Cap.

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Shott did not go through on the first boat, but remained on the shore. The skill of his wild calling had been passed down to the next generation.

François at last gave a short word or so of command in Cree. The oarsmen straightened out the boat. François motioned now to all the occupants to keep to the side, so that he would have a clear view ahead.

Little by little, as the current caught it, the scow began to slip on faster and faster. By and by waves began to come up alongside, almost to the gunwale. Rob had the vague impression that this boat was made of astonishingly thin boards, and that the water made a great noise upon it. Under the oars it creaked and strained and seemed very frail.

The men were silent now, but eager. François, pipe in mouth, was very calm as he stood at the oar, his eyes fixed straight ahead.

About half-way down the side of the island came the most dangerous part of the run. Suddenly the bowman sprang erect and cried out something in Cree, pointing sharply almost at right angles to the course of the boat. François gave a few quick orders and the oarsmen swung hard upon one side. The head of the scow swung slowly into the

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current. The channel here, however, passed between two great boulders, over the lower one of which the river broke in a high white wave. It was the duty of the steersman to swing the boat between these giant rocks, almost straight across the course of the river, a feat of extreme difficulty with such a craft or indeed with any craft. This was the bad place in the channel always known as "The Turn."

It seemed to Rob as if the whole river now was eager to accomplish their destruction. He was certain that the scow would be dashed upon the rocks and wrecked.

It was dashed upon the rocks! The turn was not made quite successfully, because of the too great weight of the cargo left in this boat. With a crash the scow ran high up on the lower rock, and lay there, half out of water, apparently the prey of the savage river. Rob felt a hand laid upon his shoulder.

"Steady, old chap!" said Uncle Dick. "Keep quiet now. We're still afloat."

This accident seemed to be something for which the men were not altogether unprepared. If they were alarmed they did not show it. There were a few quick words in Cree, to be sure, but each man went about his work methodically. Under the orders of François they shifted the cargo now to the

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floating side of the boat. All of the men except two or three pole-men took that side also. Then, under command, with vast heaving and prying on the part of the pole-men, to the surprise of Rob at least, the boat began to groan and creak, but likewise to slide and slip. Little by little it edged down into the current, until the bow was caught by the sudden sweep of the water beyond and the entire craft swung free and headed down once more! It seemed to these new-comers as an extraordinary piece of river work, and such indeed it was. A stiffer boat than this loose-built scow might have broken its back and lost its cargo, and all its crew as well. As it was, this boat went on down-stream, carrying safely all its contents.

Rob drew a long breath, but he would not show to the men any sign that he had been afraid.

Here and there among the rocks the oarsmen, under the commands of the steersman, picked their way, the lower half of the passage being much more rapid. On ahead, the river seemed to bend sharply to the left. Now Rob saw once more the bowman spring to his feet on his short forward deck. Calling out excitedly, he pointed far to the left with his shaft. Rob looked on down-stream, and

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there, a mile and a half below, he saw erected against a high bank a diamond-shaped frame or target. At this the bowman was pointing directly with his lance. It was the target put up there after the Klondike disasters by the Mounted Police, and indicated the course of the safe channel at the lower end of the chute.

François, pipe in mouth, calmly swung his sinewy body against the steering-oar. The bow of the boat crawled around to the left, far off from the island, toward the shore, where was a toboggan-like pitch of very fast but safe water for a distance of some hundreds of yards.

As they entered the head of this chute, the bowman still crouching with his pole poised, it seemed to Rob that he heard shouts and cries from the island, where, indeed, all those left behind were gathered in a body, waiting for the first boat in the annual brigade to go through—something of an event, as they regarded it.

But Rob's eyes were on ahead. He saw the boat hold its course straight as an arrow toward the great target on the farther bank. With astonishing speed it coasted down the last incline of the Grand Rapids. Then, under the skilful handling of steersman and oarsmen, the boat swung to the right, around

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a sort of promontory which extended around the right-hand bank. Rob looked around at Uncle Dick, who was curiously regarding him. But neither spoke, for both of them knew the etiquette of the wilderness—not to show excitement or uneasiness in any unusual or dangerous circumstances.

François, who had narrowly regarded his young charge, now smiled at him.

"Dot leetle boy, she is good man," he said to Uncle Dick. "He'll is not got some scares."

Rob did not tell him whether or not this was the exact truth, but only smiled in turn.

"Well, here we are," said he. "But what good does it do us? There's the foot of the island up there, three or four hundred yards away at least. And how can we get a boat up against these rapids, I'd like to know? Right here is where both the big chutes join. It would take a steamboat to get up there."

François, who understood a little English, did not vouchsafe any explanation, but only smiled, and Uncle Dick gravely motioned silence as well. Rob could see the eyes of François fixed out midstream, and, following his gaze, he presently saw some dark object bobbing about out there, going slowly down-stream.

"Look, Uncle Dick!" he cried. "What's that? It looks like a seal."

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The latter shook his head. "No seals in here," said he. "That must be a log."

"So it is," said Rob. "But look at it—it's stopped now."

No one explained to him what all this meant. François sprang to his steering-oar and gave some swift orders. The boat swung out from the bank, and under the sweeps made straight out midstream, where the black object now bobbed at the edge of the slack water. Rob could see what had stopped it now—it was made fast by a long rope, which was in turn made fast somewhere up-stream, he could not tell where.

With a swift pass of his pole the bowman caught the rope as the boat swung near. Rapidly he pulled in the short log and made fast the rope to the bow of the boat. The scow now swung into the current, its head pointed up-stream, and hung stationary there, supported against the current by some unseen power. To Rob's surprise, the oarsmen now took in their oars.

"Well, now, what's going to happen?" he asked of Uncle Dick.

But the latter only shook his head and motioned for silence.

Slowly but steadily the scow now began to ascend the river, to breast the white waters

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which came rolling down, to surmount the full force of the current of the Athabasca River in its greatest rapids!

Rob glanced on ahead. He could see a long line of men bending under the great rope which had been floated down to them in this curious way. They walked inshore, steadily following the line of the railroad track for almost a quarter of a mile, as it seemed to the other boys who watched this proceeding ashore.

Steadily the boat climbed up the river, and now, with the aid of the oarsmen and the steersman, it finally came to rest at a sheltered little cove at the foot of the island, in slack water, where the landing was good and cargo could easily be transhipped.

Rob and his older companions stepped ashore, and each smiled as he looked at the other.

"Don't tell me, son," said Uncle Dick, "that these people don't know their business! That's the finest thing I've ever seen in rough-neck engineering in all my life—and I've seen some outdoor work, too."

He stood now looking up the white water down which they had come, and at the rough hillside beyond where the old portage had lain in earlier days.

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"It's the only way it could have been done!" said he. "You see, these fellows don't carry a pound that they don't have to, but they don't risk losing a cargo by trying to run through with full load when the water won't allow it. They don't get rattled and they know their business. It's fine—fine!"

"That's what it is, sir," said Rob. "I never saw better fun in all my life."

By this time Jesse and John came running up, and the boys fell into one another's arms, asking a dozen questions all at once.

"Weren't you awfully scared?" said Jesse, somewhat awed at Rob's accomplishment.

"Well," said Rob, truthfully, "I did a good deal of thinking when we went fast on that rock out there in the middle. That was pretty bad."

"Uncle Dick," called out John, excitedly now. "Say, now, it's no fair for Rob to go through and us others not. Can't we go with the next boat?"

Uncle Dick stood looking at them quietly for a time, his hands in his pockets.

"You wait awhile," said he. "There'll be forty or fifty boats going through here. Time enough later to see whether it's safe for you two youngsters to risk it."

V

WHITE-WATER DAYS

FOR three days the work of portaging on the Grand Island continued steadily, boat after boat going down to the head of the island to discharge, then taking the run through the channel of the right-hand side. Some excitement was shown when in the still water at the head of the murderous left-hand chute, which never was attempted by the *voyageurs*, a roll of bedding with a coat tied to it was seen floating in the current. It was supposed that somewhere up the river an accident had occurred, but, as it was impossible to tell when or where, no attempt was made to solve the mystery, and the labor of advancing the brigade northward went on without further delay.

As the boys watched the river-men at their hard and heavy work, they came more and more to respect them. Throughout long hours of labor—and in this northern latitude

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the sun did not set until after nine o'clock—there was never a surly word or a complaint heard from any of them.

John, who seemed to care for facts and figures, began to ask about the wages which these men received for this hard labor. He was told that they were paid by the trip from Athabasca Landing to McMurray, which covered the bad water to the head of steam-boat transport. The steersmen for the round trip received about eighty dollars and their board, and the river-men forty to fifty dollars. All walked back across country, a shorter distance than that by water. Some of the men had along on the scows the large dogs which they used in the winter-time, and which they now purposed to employ in packing a part of their loads on the return journey.

John also discovered that the cargo of a scow averaged about twenty-five hundred dollars in value, and that it would cost sometimes almost a third of that amount to deliver the freight at its destination. For instance, the charge of the Hudson's Bay Company for freight from Athabasca Landing to Fort McPherson was thirteen dollars and fifty cents per hundred pounds. For the use of the little railroad a quarter of a mile in length on the island itself the charge to outsiders was

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one dollar a ton, and ten dollars for every boat taken across on the cars.

All the boys now began to learn more of the extreme risk and waste of this, the north-bound transit. It was not unusual, as they learned, for a scow to be lost with all its cargo, in which case the post for which it was destined would need to go without supplies until the brigade came north in the following year. Damage to goods from wetting, damage to boats from collisions—all these things went into the large figures of cost which were to be set against the figures of the large gain in this commerce of the Far North.

John got many of his figures from the Hudson's Bay Company clerk, a young man stationed here on Grand Island throughout the season, who was very friendly to all the strangers in the country. He expressed himself as very glad to see the brigade come north, for it was the only interesting time in his season's work. He and one associate remained here, cut off from the world, all through the summer season, and he was not very happy, although, as he said, he was president and general traffic-manager, as well as superintendent and board of directors, of his railroad, and section boss as well. His duties were to have general charge of the transport of

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cargoes at the island, and to keep a record of the day's doings.

Boat after boat now went through, as has been said, but without accident, although one or two hung up at The Turn, as the dangerous passage between the two great rocks in midstream now was called by all. Below that, as Rob expressed it, the bottom dropped out of the river and the boat traveled very fast.

John timed some of the boats through, and found that it took about eight minutes from the head of the eddy to the bottom of the chute. This Rob could hardly believe, as he said that when he went through it seemed not more than two minutes at the outside.

John and Jesse grew very grumpy over the prestige Rob had gained by his journey through the rapids, and besought Uncle Dick to allow them also to make the passage. Late in the third day, when most of the boats were through, they renewed their importunities, and he finally replied:

"Well, young men, I've about concluded to let you go through with the last boat. François says that he has been watching you all, and believes that you would not get 'some scares.' He says he will take you through in your own boat, which will be the last one of the brigade. The river has come

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up three or four inches since we struck in, and he says we can run through without unshipping much, if any, of our cargo, which doesn't amount to very much. Rob has made the trip, and I figure now that we are all in the same boat together. Sometimes it is necessary to be either a man or a mouse. I want to see you grow up men. Well, are you ready now?"

All the boys gladly said that they were, Rob insisting on accompanying the boat once more, as indeed was necessary, since there would be no transport after that.

They took ship at the head of the island, and were tooled across the shallow water to the head of the rapids on the farther shore. Here the men all disembarked and sat silently along the edge of the bluff, taking one of the pipe-smokes which make so regular a part of the *voyageur's* day's employment. They seemed to get some sort of comfort out of their pipes, and almost invariably when undertaking any dangerous enterprise a quiet smoke was a part of the preparation.

François talked to them, meantime, seeing that they were eager to learn about the customs of this strange and wild country into which they now were going. He told them, motioning to the steep hillside on the right of the channel, that in the old times he used to

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pack stuff across the mile-and-a-half portage there for fifty cents a hundred pounds. It was hard work, and yet he made it pay. When they began to portage on the island, and not along the mountain-side, he had made as much as fifty dollars a day, for he got five dollars for taking a boat through the rapids, or thirty dollars for running it down to Fort McPherson; so that a season's work would bring him, in very good years, over a thousand dollars, if he worked.

"But yong man, she spend the mon'," said he, smiling.

John set down in his book the facts and figures, the date of 1871, which was the time when old Cap. Shott first ran a boat through the Grand Rapids. Since that time a few other pilots had come on who proved able to handle scows in white water. But old Cap. Shott and his long-time friend, Louis La Vallee, were now both of them old—"h'almost h'eighty year, she is, each of him," said François.

"Well, now," he added at length, "we will ron h'on the *rapide*."

He rose and motioned to his men, who once more took their places at the oars, as they had in the boat which carried Rob through. Again the bowman squatted on his short fore

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deck. François, the steersman, stood on his plank walk at the handle of the great steering-oar. Gently they pushed out from shore, the last boat of the brigade.

"Here goes the *Midnight Sun!*" cried Jesse, waving his hat.

Uncle Dick watched them closely as the boat advanced. The boys spoke little or not at all, and John later accused Jesse of trying to pinch a piece out of the side of the boat, he held on so tight. But not one of them showed the white feather, nor made any trouble for the men in their work of running the fast water.

The boat at first ran along gently, the little waves lapping along the sides smartly, but not excitingly. Then at the end of the lower third the water gained in speed very much. At The Turn the waves were no doubt ten feet high. François, with a great sweep of his oar, fairly flung the boat athwart the current here, and the passage was made with no more than a scraping on the dangerous lower rock—the one which Uncle Dick called Scylla. The upper one he called Charybdis.

"You'll learn what those two words mean when you go to school a little later," said he, smiling.

Once beyond The Turn John and Jesse

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understood perfectly well what Rob had meant by saying that the bottom fell out of the river. They were excited, but had no thought of fear by the time they entered the last chute where the scow tobogganed down to the foot of the island. A moment later it was at rest once more in the eddy below the promontory.

Rob explained now about the log float which had carried the rope down to their boat when he first went through. There was, however, no longer need for the float to carry down a line to the boat. The brigade was through and the last scow below the island. The clerk and his taciturn companion were left alone. They stood now, both of them, waving their hats to the occupants of the *Midnight Sun* as, after a little, at the command of François, she pushed out from the eddy and took her place in the long procession of the north-bound brigade, every man of which now felt a sense of relief, since the most dangerous part of the early journey, the portage of the Grand Rapids of the Athabasca, had been safely accomplished.

The flotilla was now strung out over many miles of water, but it was the intention to make several miles additional before stopping for the night. In the late twilight, here

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strangely long and bright, Rob went on with his notes in his diary, while John worked at his map, charting as best he could the right-hand channel through which they had made their exciting journey. Rob's notes later proved of interest to his friends, as they explained very much about the journey of this dangerous two hundred and fifty miles of the white-water transport.

“Wednesday, June 4th. — Everybody busy all day. At 5 P.M. most of the freight on the island, and getting loaded on cars. Slept in the little mosquito tents. Very busy day.

*“Thursday, June 5th.—*Many pictures to-day, and we all were busy. Curious work running boats through the rapids and getting boat back to end of island. I think that rope that they let down to the boat is almost a quarter of a mile long. It takes twenty men or more to haul a boat up against the rapids, empty, of course.

“Off in the Midnight Sun below the island late afternoon. Ran the little Grand Rapids, and swung into the Second Eddy for supper. After that ran seven miles. Camp ground very bad. Mosquitoes getting worse.

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“Friday, June 6th.—A great many rapids to-day. The Buffalo seems mild to us after the Grand. The Brûlé Rapids we liked because they had some pep to them. At about 3 P.M. we hit the Boiler Rapids, which is one of the worst. Name because a scow was lost here that was carrying a boiler up north. The boiler has never been recovered. Rapids full of boulders, and in low water very bad. Not very dangerous at this stage. Everybody was still as we went through this place and came into what they called the Rapids of the Drowned. They say a great many men have been drowned there, and it certainly looked bad. These two rapids are about a mile and a half altogether.

“Four boats were tied back because not everybody can run these rapids. Our boat was in the lead. Then four pilots walked back to bring through the boats which had been held up. We made pictures of them as they came through. Supper at 5 as we floated along, and then we dropped into the Middle Rapids and had a beautiful time.

“One or two canoes ran through with breeds. Pretty exciting. They say few

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of these breeds can swim, but they don't seem to mind that. Saw several wrecks of scows along the shores here, and one boat upset in the middle of the rapids. Some machinery on shore below rapids, very rusty. Begin to understand why freight comes high. Sometimes half a cargo is wasted or lost. No farms, no horses, no cows. A good game country. They say the game and fish keep the white men alive. The little boy Charl' keeps with the good Sisters. He was scared going through the rapids, and so were they.

"On the Long Rapids, as we passed through, we saw the fresh grave of one of the men who was drowned here the other day. Only one body was found. Their canoe was all broken up.

"On the Crooked Rapids we saw where the men have to track the boats going up-stream. Don't see how they keep from falling off the bank. Below the Crooked come the Stony Rapids, and what the boatmen call the Dive, a sudden dip down of three or four feet. Sometimes boats ship seas. Scenery this evening bold and interesting. Some cliffs. Fast water all day. Camp at 8 o'clock on a

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good high bluff. Mosquitoes not quite so bad. Nights cool. This ended the most glorious day I ever spent out of doors, I believe.

“Saturday, June 7th.—Beautiful weather. Passed cliffs where they say there is oil. I don’t know. We heard heavy rapids below, and at 7 A.M. got into them. They call this the Little Cascade. A ledge runs across the river. At 9 o’clock we came to one of the big jumps on the river known as the Grand Cascade. About the worst man-trap there is in low water, they say. We concluded to run her. Our boat goes first. Some boats tie back to wait for our pilots. There are three good pilots to eight boats. Many pictures of boats running the Cascade, which drops eight or ten feet like a mill-dam. Wonderful what these men can do with the boat.

“Now three or four small rapids which I don’t mind, then at 11.45 we struck Mountain Rapids, which made little Charl’ ‘get some scares,’ as François says. Sometimes we eat on the boat. I asked Father Le Fèvre if he had prayed for high water, and he said yes. Then I asked him what he did if high water

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didn't come. He said, 'My son, although in that case I prayed for high water, perhaps God likewise took another way to show His power, and so saved us out of even greater danger and discomfort.' He's a bird.

"The Moberly Rapids don't amount to much. We ran them at 1.30—the last on the great chain of rapids, so they say. In about fifteen minutes we could see Fort McMurray on ahead. Many scows were lying along the shore, mostly loaded, some empty. Climbed up a steep hill to a fine flat on top of the bluff. Woods all around. A fine site for a town, and the Indians have it. The flat was covered with tepees, also some tents. There were dogs and dogs and babies and babies everywhere, with squaws and Indian men walking around all dressed up in their best. The Indian agent is going to pay their treaty money. It is only eight hundred and fifty dollars altogether—not very much, I think. Hear a lot of talk about lands and towns and railroads and oil.

"There are some Chippewyans here, and a lot of Crees, but these northern Indians don't speak the Cree language.

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Got my moccasins mended. Made some pictures. The *Grahame* is the name of the H. B. steamboat which is going to take us down the river from here. We will tow our scow and sleep on the steamboat. Monday morning is when we start.

"*Sunday, June 8th.*—The treaty payment goes on, although it is Sunday. Indian men sitting down on the grass before the commissioner. He asks each one what right he has to claim money from the Great Father, I suppose. Once in a while he turns to the clerk and says, 'We'll give this old duffer twenty bucks.' This doesn't look to me like very much money. I don't think they get much help. They are poor and dependent. If they couldn't rustle well out of doors they all would die. Much trade finery among the natives, who dress very bright. Several Northwest Mounted Policemen in red-jacket uniform who go north with us on the boat. She is going to be crowded. The judge and his party are going on the scows.

"Well, this is the end of the scow-work for us, so it seems. Uncle Dick thinks we will be more comfortable on the steamer, and will see more people to talk

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to than if we stuck to our own scow. We will tow her alongside. I hope they will let us run through the Smith's Landing portage, on the Little Slave, a hundred miles below here. I never had a better time in my life than the first 250 miles. The mosquitoes don't bother us quite so much. John eats a great deal, and Jesse is getting fat. Having a bully time."

VI

ON THE STEAMBOAT

AS Rob indicated in his diary, the start from McMurray was made early on Monday morning, but the stop was long enough for the boys to gain an idea of the importance of this busy frontier settlement. Here also came in the Clearwater River, down which, by way of a chain of lakes, all the brigade traffic used to come before the discovery that the Grand Rapids themselves could be run. When it is remembered that the start was made from Athabasca Landing on May 29th, and the arrival at McMurray on June 7th, it will be seen that, crude as the system and the means of transport had been, a great deal of results had been attained. Rob figured that at the rate of two hundred and fifty miles a week they would not get very far, but Uncle Dick pointed out that now, since they had reached steamer transport, the journey would advance very rapidly.

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The steamboat, after its start, passed the string of scows, among which were some boats of independent traders, and a few hardy adventurers bound north, for what purpose they hardly knew.

The *Grahame* advanced steadily and rapidly down-stream. Some of the passengers excitedly tried to point out to Uncle Dick the value of the oil-lands in this part of the world, but Uncle Dick only smiled and said he was out for a good time, and not building railroads now.

The weather grew quite warm, and in the state-rooms the boys found that the thermometer stood at ninety degrees. With one step for wood at a yard where the natives had piled up enormous quantities of cordwood, the boat tied up after making perhaps sixty miles.

On the following day she continued her steady progress down-stream between the green-lined shores. The banks of the river now grew lower and lower, and by nine o'clock in the evening, at which time it still was light, there began to show the marshes of the Peace River Delta, one of the most important deltas in all the world. The boat ran on into the night, and before midnight had passed the mouths of the Quatre Fourches, or

ON THE STEAMBOAT

Four Forks, which make the mouth of the Peace River.

The boys wondered at the great marshes which now they saw, and Uncle Dick explained to them that here was one of the greatest wild-fowl breeding-grounds in all the world.

"If there were any way in the world for sportsmen to get up here," said he, "this country would soon be famous, for it certainly is a wilderness. Here is where the natives shoot wild geese for their winter's meat. And as for ducks, there is no numbering them."

Every one sat on the decks of the boat late at night, and we may rest assured that the boys were on hand when finally the *Grahame* swung to her moorings along the rocky shore of historic Fort Chippewyan.

In the morning they went ashore eagerly and gazed with wonderment over the wild scene which lay all about. The point where they landed was a rocky promontory. Before it lay high, rocky islands, among which ran the channels of the two great rivers which here met in the great waters of Athabasca Lake.

"Just to think," said Rob to his friends, "this post here was founded a hundred and forty-three years ago. My, but I'd have liked

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to have been with old Sir Alexander at that time! He ought to have a monument here, it seems to me, or some sort of tablet; but there isn't a thing to tell about his having found this place or done anything extraordinary."

"I wonder how much these natives here are going to get in the way of treaty money," said John, as he saw the commissioner again putting up his tent with the flag of his country above it. "There are a lot of canoes coming in from everywhere, so they say—fifty Cree boats from their camp. They tell me that the Crees and Chippewyans don't mix any too well. I think the Crees have got them scared when it comes to that."

"Well, these dogs have got me scared," complained Jesse. "I never saw so many dogs in all my life. And there isn't a cow anywhere in the world, nor even a goat or sheep."

"They have to have these dogs in the winter-time, you understand," said John, paternally. "They pull as much as a team of horses would in the snow."

"Yes, and they eat as much as a horse would," said Jesse. "The bacon for Fort Resolution was unloaded here last night, and the dogs ate up more than a ton of it; there's

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nothing left there except a lot of paper and pieces of canvas! I'll bet it's the first time these dogs here ever had a square meal in their lives!"

"I don't know about that," said Rob, laughing. "Look over yonder." He pointed to where an Indian woman sat on the ground, cleaning a lot of fish. Around her squatted a circle of gaunt, wolfish creatures which seemed ready to devour her and her fish alike.

Uncle Dick joined their group as they wandered around, and explained such things as they did not understand.

"This is one of the greatest posts of all the fur trade," said he. "It is the center, as you have learned, of a lot of the native tribes in this part of the world. It ships from here an enormous amount of fur which the traders collect. The independent traders are breaking in here now, but the natives learn to catch more and more fur, so it seems. I suppose in time it will be exterminated. Then the natives will go, too.

"Over yonder is a tombstone, but not any monument for Sir Alexander. It tells about the life-history of an old factor who lived here for so long in this wilderness. It's all old, old, old—older almost than any city in the United States, or at least older than a great

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many of our considerable cities. But you would think this was at the beginning. There are the natives, and there are the dogs, just as they were when Sir Alexander came through. Perhaps they didn't have so much calico then. Of course they didn't have repeating-rifles then, and surely not steel traps. But they talked the same language, and in my opinion they had about as much religion then as they have now."

"What's that boat out there with a sail on it?" demanded Rob, after a time, pointing to a small craft which was moored near by.

"Goodness only knows," replied Uncle Dick. "There are all sorts of fool adventurers in the world, and they take all sorts of fool chances. I have heard that there are a half-dozen prospectors in that schooner, going north, they don't know where nor why.

"Well, at least we can say we're in the North here," he added. "They get just nine mails a year at Chippewyan, about four mails in and the rest of them go out. In the summer-time mail service runs about once a month.

"They say they did have a horse in here two years ago, and that it ran off, and they did not find it for two years. They had a team at Fort McMurray, and it was lost, too. I wouldn't call this a good horse country

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myself! No, it's a fur country and an Indian country. That's why it's interesting to us, isn't it?"

"Well," said John, "we ought to get some pictures of the treaty payments to the Indians to show our folks back home how they live up here. I wish I had brought along twice as many rolls of film as I've got. I never get tired of making pictures of dogs and Indians."

"Well, when you are photographing Indians study Indians, too," said Uncle Dick. "Most people look at Indians just as an object of curiosity, but he may be quite a fellow, even so. For instance, there are these Crees sitting over there in the grass before the flag, waiting for their treaty money. They flock by themselves, quite distinct from the Chippewyans; they don't camp within three miles of each other. As you know, the Crees are of the Algonquin family. They have pushed west all the way from eastern Canada, following the fur trade. They have followed up the Red River and down the Athabasca, and they have overrun all the intervening tribes and elected themselves chiefs and bosses pretty much. You may call the Cree half-breed the mainstay of all the northern fur trade.

"But now," he added, "we are getting beyond the country even of the Crees. Here

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at Chippewyan is the farthest north of the Cree so far. Now we are going to find a lot of other different tribes."

The boys passed here and there along the rocky shore among the villages of the natives and among the stoutly built log houses of the fur-post itself. Here and there a woman was sitting in front of her tent, trying to operate one of the little cheap hand sewing-machines which had been brought on for the first time that year. In another tent strange sounds came which seemed familiar to the boys. They discovered that a proud family had purchased a cheap phonograph, and under the instruction of one of the clerks was proceeding to produce what is sometimes called melody. These things, however, did not interest the young adventurers so much as the more primitive scenes of the native life.

Here they saw a boatman fresh from his nets, with half a boat-load of fish still alive, throw out some of the live fish, among them a number of pickerel, or Great Northern Pike, to his dogs, which sat waiting on the shore for his arrival. A dog would seize a five-pound fish by the head, kill it, and eat it outright, bones and all.

"They never get enough to eat," said John. "They're hungry all the time."

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"Well," said Jesse, laughing, "that's the same way with you, isn't it, John?"

"That's all right," said John, testily. "I'm growing, that's why I eat so much. But as for you, Jesse, you'd better keep away from these dogs. Do you know what I heard? It was old Colin Frazer, the fur-trader, told me. He said there was a child killed last winter out on the ice by dogs, and they ate it up, every bit. You see, it had on a caribou coat, and it was alone at the time. The dogs killed it and ate it. Sometimes they eat little dogs, too. They'll eat anything and never get enough. But I suppose they have to have dogs here the same as they have to have Indians, else they could have no fur trade."

"The old trader up at the post is mighty crusty, it seems to me," complained Jesse, after a time. "He won't let me go up in the fur-loft, where he keeps his silver-gray foxes and all that sort of thing, to make any pictures. What's the reason he won't?"

Rob smiled as he answered: "The Hudson's Bay Company is a big monopoly and it keeps its own secrets. You'll have to ask a good many questions before you find out much about its business. And if you should try to buy even one skin of an ermine or a marten or a fox or a mink in here, you couldn't do it.

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They wouldn't sell you anything at all. Perhaps some of the independent traders who are coming in might sell you some furs for yourself—at a very good price. But the old Company stands pat and runs its affairs the way it used to. It doesn't tell its secrets."

The boys stood, hands in pockets now, toward the close of their interesting day at Chippewyan, looking in silence at the squared logs of the whitewashed Company buildings. A certain respect came into their minds.

"It's old," said John, after a time. "They don't seem to rustle very much now, but they have done things—haven't they?"

VII

THE WILD PORTAGE

ACCORDING to Rob's diary, it was on Friday, June 13th, that the steamer *Grahame* left the ancient trading-post of Chippewyan on the rocky shores of Athabasca Lake. Rob also made the curious entry that as the boat left shore two ravens flew across its bow, and that the Indians and half-breeds were very much distressed over what they considered a bad omen. Uncle Dick and his two companions, Jesse and John, laughed with Rob at this, and, indeed, no ill fortune seemed to attend them.

By this time the great brigade had begun to thin and scatter. Several scows were unloaded and left at Chippewyan. Yet others were despatched for the post at the eastern side of the lake. The legal party and the Indian Commissioner now parted company with our travelers. But occasionally, as the steamer swept away from the high and bold

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shores on which the old trading-post lay, and passed the vast marshes where the wild-fowl nest in millions every year, they found in the main current of the river scattered odds and ends of river traffic, now and then a brigade scow, or the shapeless boat of some prospector going north, he knew not how or where.

Continually, however, the impression of the deepening of the wilderness fell upon our party as they pushed on steadily down-stream between the low timbered banks of the river. John now noted on his map that this river, the outlet of Lake Athabasca, which received the combined floods of the Peace and the Athabasca, was known as the Slave River, or sometimes the Little Slave River.

As had been the Athabasca all the way down, this river was very much discolored and stained by the high waters of the spring.

"Now, young men," said Uncle Dick to his charges as they stood on the fore deck of the steamer in the hot sun of midafternoon, "you can say that you are getting into the real wilderness. It runs every way you can look—west, north, south, and east. From where we are now, draw a circle large as you like, and you will embrace in it thousands of miles of country which no man really knows. Trust not too much even in the Dominion

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maps. I'd rather trust John's map, here, because he doesn't have to guess."

"Well," said John, looking up from his own work with his papers, "it doesn't seem such a very wild trip now, traveling along on the steamboat. It might as well be along the Alaska shore, or even on the Hudson River—if the things we had to eat were better."

"Never you mind about all that," rejoined his uncle. "If you want to see wild work with a thrill to it, you shall have all you care for within the next few days. To-morrow we'll be at Smith's Landing, which marks the sixteen-mile portage of the Slave River. I suppose in there you'll see the wildest water in the world, so far as boating is concerned. I'll warrant you you'll think you are in the wilderness when you see the Cassette Falls and any of a hundred others between Smith's Landing and the Mountain Portage. I've been talking with the boat captain about those things."

Rob looked up from the book which he was reading. "It says," remarked he, "that Sir Alexander Mackenzie knew all this country as far down as the big portage here."

"Quite likely," replied Uncle Dick. "The truth is that all of this early exploration which comes down to us in history was perhaps not

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so difficult as it sounds. There is continual trading back and forward among the Indian tribes, even when they are hostile to one another. Sir Alexander no doubt heard from each of these various tribes all about their country as far north as the next tribe. Then that tribe in turn could give him advice and guidance. So he was passed on, much as Lewis and Clark were, or Major Long, or Captain Pike, in our own explorations. Nearly all the time he had a native guide to tell him what he might expect on ahead.

"One thing sure," he added, "from all they tell me about the rapids of the Slave at Smith's Landing, he would have had a hard time if he had run directly into the big current at the head of the falls without any warning. But I suppose for hundreds of years the natives hereabouts have known about those falls, and naturally that would be the first thing they would tell any new man in the country."

It was seven o'clock in the evening of June 14th, at the end of a cold and dull day's travel, that the boys found themselves in the Big Eddy along the bank of the post known as Smith's Landing. This spot is directly above the Great Falls of the Slave River, and marks the place for unloading of the cargoes

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of the boats which must be portaged across the sixteen miles of land, or taken down by the hazardous passage through the rapids themselves.

As the boat with its warning whistle drew up alongside the shore there thronged down to the side of the landing the usual crowd of natives, a few white men, many half-breeds, and countless dogs. On the bank above stood the usual row of whitewashed buildings which marked the Hudson's Bay post, not very many in all, even counting the scattered cabins of the population which had drawn in about this upper post.

"Two things you will observe here," said the leader of our young adventurers. "Smith's Landing has a sidewalk, and Smith's Landing also has a team of horses! You may mark this place as farthest north for the domestic horse—you will not see another one north of here. They have to have this team to get the goods across by wagon. Sometimes, too, they track a scow over, I believe, although the road is not very good."

"Well, how did they come to have that sidewalk?" asked John, pointing to the narrow and unimportant strip of walk which lay in front of one of the warehouses.

Uncle Dick smiled. "The captain of the

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boat told me that they wanted some telephone-poles to string a wire from here across to Fort Smith, over the portage. So the wise authorities of the Company had Montreal send out enough square-sawed four-inch joists to make poles for fifty miles of telephone—and right in a country where there are better telephone-poles than you could get at Montreal! So they were all brought through, with what trouble you can imagine, since you have seen the sort of transport they must have had coming this far. The factor could not use them all, so he put up a few and laid the others in the form of a sidewalk. I'll say it's lasting, at least!

"As for those horses, however," he continued, "we'll take a crack at them ourselves if we have luck. You've been complaining that things are not exciting enough, and I propose to give you a touch of life. After we get done our work here—that is to say, after everybody has drunk up all the Scotch whisky that has come north on this boat—we'll be getting on about our business. We'll take our scow through.

"I'm going to contract with old Johnny Belcore, the traffic-handler here, to take our boat and an extra scow around through the rapids of the Slave River. You'll see he'll

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ship his horses along to use on the portages, and there'll be more than one of them. It would take a lot of men to track one of these boats up the bank and along a mile or so of dry ground. They tell me that he uses rollers and pulls the boats by horse power. So, as that is one more example of the way the brigade gets its goods north, we'll use that, if only for the sake of our own information."

"That 'll be fine," said Rob. "I'd much rather do that than climb on top of a lumber-wagon and ride across sixteen miles of muskeg. If we did that we'd miss all the excitement of seeing the Big Rapids of the Slave. I've been reading about them. You're right, this is perhaps as bad boat water as any actually used by men."

"Do you suppose it is worse than the White Horse Rapids up on the head of the Yukon?" asked John, looking up.

Uncle Dick laughed at this. "Son," said he, "the White Horse Rapids could be lost a thousand times here in the falls of the Slave River, and no one would know where they went. Those rapids got their reputation through the stories of tenderfeet, for the most part. They don't touch the Grand Rapids of the Athabasca, and the Grand Rapids don't touch the Slave. She drops a hundred and

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sixty-five feet in sixteen miles! You can figure what that means, and if you can't figure it we'll see it with our own eyes."

"I read once in some sort of a magazine story," said Rob, "that the Peace River buffalo herd is somewhere up in this country, and that when people want to find out about it they go to Smith's Landing."

"That's true," said Uncle Dick. "That somewhat mythical herd has been under the more or less mythical charge of the Dominion government in here for some time. It isn't worth while for us to make a trip out to see it; that is usually done by parties who are going back from here. Nor do we care to see the celebrated Dominion government reindeer herd which is out on the promontory of the Mountain Portage below here.

"I understand there were about a dozen of these reindeer once, but most of them got into the river and swam across. The last report was that the keeper of this herd had only one reindeer left, and he was sitting tight, with several Lapland dogs which had been sent out by the government!"

"The trouble with people that run things," said Rob, judicially, "is that sometimes they don't know about the things they are running."

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"Well, I don't see why they sent reindeer up into the caribou country," said Jesse. "Of course I'm only a boy, but I can't see why they do that."

Uncle Dick grinned. "We may see a good many things we can't understand before we get done with the trip. But all the same we'll have a good time finding out."

"You may sleep ashore to-night, young men," he said, later, "for perhaps you would rather not lie in your berths on the boat. The captain tells me that Smith's Landing is famous for its mosquitoes—they are supposed to be worse here than anywhere else on earth."

"Well, that's saying a good deal," said John. "I didn't know there were so many mosquitoes in all the world. What makes them, anyhow, and what do they have them for, Uncle Dick?"

That gentleman only shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands. "It's all in the game," said he. "You must learn not to kick. Look at the half-breeds all around. How hard their life is, and what punishment they have to take all the time. Well, they don't kick. One great lesson of this trip ought to be to take your medicine and be game and quiet as well."

The boys did not find the stop at Smith's

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Landing of special interest, for there was so much drunkenness among all the population that they became quite disgusted at the sloth and noisiness of it all. They learned through the captain that while liquor is not allowed to be sold generally at the Hudson's Bay posts, among natives, the government does allow a "permit" to any one going into that country, so that each traveler might legally take a gallon of liquor for "medicinal purposes." Sometimes a white trader or employee would be allowed to import each year a gallon of liquor on a "permit." The captain told one instance, more gruesome than amusing, which had just happened that week. A man at Smith's Landing had ordered his annual gallon of liquor, but meantime he had died. As he could not use the liquor, the question arose to whom did it belong. That was decided, so he said, by a game of cards in the warehouse on the bank. That the contents of the dead man's liquor-case found use was easy enough to see.

The tales regarding the mosquitoes at Smith's Landing proved more than true. Our young travelers found that the best of their mosquito dope was of little or no avail, so that they wore headnets and long gloves almost always.

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By this time they had learned to manage their sleeping-tents so that they could keep out the insects at night, and lost but little sleep, even amid the continual howling of the dogs and the carousing of the half-drunken population of the place.

Meantime, albeit slowly, the cargoes of the scows and of the steamer were being portaged by wagon over the sixteen miles of flat timbered country. This work went on for nearly a week. It was Thursday, June 19th, when Uncle Dick announced to Rob and John and Jesse that now they would be off for the exciting enterprise of taking their boat down the rapids of the Slave. Johnny Belcore, as the freight contractor was named, had finally secured a Cree pilot who knew the ancient channel, used time out of mind by the Hudson's Bay boats which risked this dangerous passage. He agreed to take the *Midnight Sun* across the portage for fifty dollars, and to charge seventy-five cents for each hundred pounds of freight. During the short season of the brigade's passage north, at which time most of the amateurs and independents were crowding northward, Belcore made a very considerable amount of money. Our party, however, thought his charges entirely reasonable, and, indeed, would not, for any money, have fore-

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gone the pleasure of running these redoubtable rapids. They learned now that three other scows were going through also. Belcore had his team on one of these, and had brought along twenty-seven men to man the boats, to handle the team, etc.

In the early evening this little flotilla pushed off, with few regrets at leaving Smith's Landing behind. On the left lay the dangerous and treacherous falls of the Priest Rapids, so called by reason of the loss there of a Catholic priest and a companion years ago. The boats, however, were rowed in slack water across above these big falls, then took two fast chutes upon the farther side. After this smart water the commodore of the little fleet pulled in to portage the Cassette Falls, that tremendous cascade of the Slave River which so terrifies the ordinary observer when first he sees its enormous display of power. There are perhaps few more terrifying spectacles of wild water, even including the Whirlpool Rapids at Niagara.

That night our party lay in bivouac, and were up early in the work of the portage. All the goods had to be unloaded and all the scows were hauled up the steep bank by means of a block and tackle. Once up the bank, the team, which had been brought along

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in one of the scows and forced to climb up the bank, were hitched to a long rope, and with the aid also of men tugging at the ropes they rapidly hauled the boat over the high and rocky ground which made the portage—a distance of some four hundred yards in all.

It was about four o'clock that afternoon when the boats had finished this first portage and had been again loaded below the sharp drop at the farther end.

The boys continually hung about the men in this curious and interesting work, and plied Belcore with many questions. He explained to them that the Cassette Falls are on one of four or five different channels into which the Slave River breaks hereabouts. Many of these chutes could not be run at all, nor could a boat be lined down through them by any possibility. In spite of all this, as he explained, one or two boats of ignorant prospectors actually had found their way down the rapids of the Slave, preserved by Providence, as Belcore piously affirmed.

After the Cassette Portage there came a curve in the rapid run of water where a canoe hardly could have lived, as the boys thought, then five miles of very slow water where all the men had to row, the Slave River being nothing if not freakish in its methods hereabouts. At

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times far to the left, through the many tree-covered islands, the boys could see the fast channel of the Slave River proper, a tremendous flood pouring steadily northward to the Arctic Sea.

Belcore said the drop of the Slave was two hundred feet in the entire length of the portage, but the government estimate is a hundred and sixty-five feet.

"Well," said John, doing a little figuring on the margin of his map, "we're going downhill pretty fast, it seems to me, as we go north. The Grand Rapids drop only fifty-five feet. From Athabasca Landing to McMurray there is a drop of eight hundred and sixty feet in the two hundred and fifty-two miles. That's going some. And here we drop a hundred and sixty-five feet in about sixteen miles. It's no wonder the water gets rough sometimes."

Belcore pointed out to them, far to the left, late that evening, the Middle Rapids, whose heavy roar they could hear coming to them across the distance. They could not really see these rapids, as they bore off to the right to make the second portage. The pilot found his way without any chart through a maze of slack water and blind channels hidden among the islands. Belcore told them that no one knew all of the Slave River at this

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point, but that the Indians remembered the way they had been following, which their fathers and their fathers' fathers had handed down to them in the traditions of the tribes.

At this second portage, or traverse, the goods were carried across by the wagon and team, the boats meantime making two portages in a quarter of a mile. At the last run of the boats the men stopped calmly no more than fifty yards above a chute which would have wrecked any craft undertaking to make the run through.

For yet another day the block-and-tackle work on the scows, the horse-and-wagon labor with the goods, continued. The boats were sometimes hauled over wide ridges of rough rocks, till the wonder was that they held together at all. There was one ancient craft, a York boat of earlier times, which the Company was taking through, and this, being stiffly built with a keel, was badly strained and rendered very leaky by the time it got through the rude traverse of the rocky portage. The men took tallow and oakum and roughly calked the seams of this boat, so that it was possible to get it across the river to Fort Smith eventually. A wagon-tire came off, which left the wagon helpless. The half-

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breeds did not complain, but carried its load on their own backs.

"Well," said Rob to John, as they stood apart at one time, watching this wild labor, "Uncle Dick was right. We are in the wilderness now. This is a land of chance—every fellow has to take his risks without grumbling, and his work, too. I like to see these men work; they are so strong."

"They tell me that they are not going to drag all the scows across," said John. "They're going to try to run that bad chute below our landing with a couple of scows. The men say it takes too long to wagon them across, and they would much rather take the chance."

"Fine!" said Rob. "We'll go make some pictures of them as they go through."

"Hurry on, then," rejoined John, "and get Jesse. We ought to get some fine pictures there. I've been down and seen that place, and the water drops higher than the roof of a house and goes through a narrow place where you could touch both sides with the oars."

It was indeed as they had said—the half-breeds, careless ever of danger, and willing only to work when work was necessary, actually did run two scows down the narrow chute of the Middle Rapids. The boys, cameras in hand, did their best to make pict-

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ures of the event, and stood hardly breathing as they saw the boats go down the toboggan-like incline between two great boulders which the poles of the boatmen touched on either side.

As the scow struck the level water at the foot of this chute or cascade, her bow was submerged for almost a third of the length, and the men in front were wet waist-high. She still floated, however, as she swung into the strong current below, and the men with shouts of excitement rowed and poled her ashore. To them it seemed much better to take a half-hour of danger than a half-day of work. As a matter of fact, both boats came through not much the worse for wear, and perhaps not as badly damaged as they would have been if dragged on the rollers across the rocky hillside.

"Well, boys," said Uncle Dick to them, as at length he found them returning from this exciting incident, "it's time to eat again. It ought to please you, John. These men have to work so hard that they are fed four times a day. This is meal Number Four we're going to have now."

John laughingly agreed to this, and soon their party were seated cross-legged, with their tin plates, around the stove which the

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contractor's cook had set up on the shore. The delay was not very long, for now, after finishing the second portage of the boats, the men fell to and slid the last of the scows down a twenty-five-foot bank and once more into the current of the stream.

The next great labor of this short but strenuous sixteen miles was, so they were informed, to come at the Mountain Portage, a spot historic in all the annals of the north-bound Hudson's Bay traffic.

The boats, now assembled safely and once more reloaded, followed their leader through a number of blind channels which caused the boys to marvel, across the Slave River to the left, rowed up in slack water for a time, and at last dropped down below the Pelican Rapids. Now, under the excited cries of the pilot, the men rowed hard. The boats crossed the full flood of the Slave River for a mile and a half, then slipped down on fast water, using the eddies beautifully, and at last dropped into the notch in a high barrier which seemed to rise up directly ahead of them. Off to the right, curving about the great promontory, foamed the impassable waters known as the Mountain Rapids.

All the north-bound freight which was not traversed by wagon across Smith's Landing

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must be carried on manback over the Mountain Portage. The hill which rose up from the riverside was crossed by a sandy road or track, the eminence being about a hundred and fifty feet on the upper side and perhaps two hundred feet on the lower.

Of course here every boat had to be unloaded once more. A little settlement of tents and tarpaulins and mosquito bars rapidly arose. It was a rainy camp that night, and most of the men slept drenched in their blankets, but in the morning they arose without complaint to begin their arduous labor of packing tons of supplies across this high and sandy hill.

The party here was joined by a group of four prospectors who had brought their scows in some way down this far by the aid of a pilot not accredited by the traders. All these boats, therefore, had to take turns at the Landing in the discharge of their cargoes. As to the mission scows and Father Le Fèvre, they were left far behind, nor were they heard from for some time.

"The wonder is to me that there isn't more trouble and quarreling on this far-off trail," said Rob to Uncle Dick as they stood watching the men toiling up the sandy slope under their heavy burdens, each man carrying at least

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a hundred pounds, some of them twice that. "I should think every one would lose his temper once in a while."

Uncle Dick smiled at this remark. "They do sometimes," said he, "although I think there is no country in the world so good for a man's temper as this northern wilderness. A fellow just naturally learns that he has got to keep cool. But the parties like the Klondike tenderfeet were always quarreling among themselves. I heard of one party of four on the Grand Rapids who concluded to split up. So they divided their supplies into two halves exactly, and even sawed their boat in two, so neither party could complain that the other had not been fair!

"Well, anyhow," he continued, as the boys laughed at this story—a true one—"we cannot accuse any of our men here of being ill-tempered. They are using this haul as they have for maybe a hundred years or so. This is the Hudson's Bay Company's idea of getting its goods north. With the use of a few hundred dollars and the labor of a few men they could improve all these portages through here so that they could save a week of time and hundreds of dollars in labor charges each season. Will they do it? They will not. Why? Because they are the Hudson's Bay

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Company—The Honorable Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay."

"That's right. That's the trouble," said John. "I saw that name on a little bottle which had a little cocktail in it, just about one drink, the man said who had it. They seem to be rather proud of their name. It went clean around the bottle."

"I suppose so," said Uncle Dick, "and they have a right to be proud in many ways, for it covers a wonderful record. You can't call it a record of enterprise, however, and that's why the independents are coming in here, and going to steal the land out from under them before very long. I could take two men and a team, and in two days' time cut the top off this hill here at the Mountain Portage. It takes our twenty-four men and a team four hours to get one scow up the hill. To an American engineer that doesn't look very much like good business. But inasmuch as it isn't all our funeral, we'll take our medicine and won't kick—remembering what I've told you about the lessons we ought to learn from all this.

"But now remember one thing," he went on. "In the old times, before there was any steamboat on the Mackenzie or on the Slave

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River, every bit of the fur had to go out in boats under the tracking-line. They tell me the old tracking-path ran yonder around the promontory. A jolly stiff pull, I'll warrant you, they had getting up through here. But think of it—they did it not only one year, but every year for more than a hundred years!"

Rob continued his diary more or less impatiently during the time they lay at the Mountain Portage, but noted that on Monday, June 23d, at seven-thirty in the evening, the work was all concluded. His notes ran:

"We are off. Fort Smith is next. Fast water. Pilot Boniface in bow. River very wide below the Mountain Rapids, and wanders very much—every which way. Shallow so the boats have trouble. They say no one could run the big water below Pelican Island off to the right. Crossed the river in a wide circle. Could hear roar of heavy rapids on both sides. Boniface says if the water was high we would run the big rapids on the left straight through, but we cannot do it now. Our channel is crooked like a double letter S, and I don't see how he follows it. It takes fancy steering.

"We are following what they call the

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old Hudson's Bay channel. This carries us to the right-hand side of the river, and it looks a mile or two across. Storm came up and we got wet. Over to the left we could see lights. They said it was the steamboat *Mackenzie River* lying at her moorings at Fort Smith. Jolly glad to get done with this work.

"Dark and wet and late. Went on board steamboat. Quite a post here. A good many strangers besides the Company people. Well, here we are at the head of the Mackenzie River, or the Big Slave, as they call it here. I'm pretty glad."

VIII

ON THE MACKENZIE

THE three young companions stood in the bright sunlight on the high bank of Fort Smith at the foot of which lay the steamer which was to carry them yet farther on their northwest journey. About them lay the scattered settlements at the foot of the Grand Traverse between the Slave and the Mackenzie. Off to the right, along the low bed of the river, lay the encampment of the natives, waiting for the "trade" of the season. Upon the other hand were the log houses of the Company employees, structures not quite so well built, perhaps, as those at Chippewyan, but adapted to the severity of this northern climate.

At the foot of the high embankment, busy among the unloaded piles of cargo which had been traversed from the disembarkment point of Smith's Landing, trotted in steady stream the sinewy laborers, the same half-breeds

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who everywhere make the reliance of the fur trade in the upper latitudes. They were carrying now on board the *Mackenzie River*, as the steamboat was named, the usual heavy loads of flour, bacon, side-meat, sugar, trade goods, all the staples of the trade, not too expensive in their total.

There were to be seen also the human flotsam and jetsam of this northern country—miners, prospectors, drifters, government employees, and adventurers—all caught here as though in the cleats of a flume, at this focusing-point at the foot of the wild northern waters.

"John," said Jesse, at last, as he drew a full breath of warm yet invigorating air, "how is your map coming along?"

"Pretty well," replied John. "I've got everything charted this far. Look here how I've put down our journey through the rapids of the Slave River; we zigzagged all about. I put down the rocks and the biggest headlands, so I think I've got it pretty close to correct. I wonder how we ever got through there, and how the old Company men first went through."

"Two boats came through directly over the big rapids which we didn't dare tackle," said Rob. "They were tenderfeet, and they don't know to this day how lucky they were."

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"Well, we were lucky enough, too," said John, "for in spite of our bad omens at Chippewyan, everything has come through fine. Here we are, all ready for our last great swing to the North. Look here on the map, fellows—I always thought that the Mackenzie River ran straight north up to the Arctic Ocean, but look here—if you start from where we are right now, and follow the Great Slave River on out through Great Slave Lake, you'll find it runs almost as much west as it does north. It lurches clear over toward Alaska, although it's all on British ground."

Jesse expressed his surprise at seeing so many "common-looking people," as he called it, up here in the fur country, where he had expected to find only gaudily dressed traders and trappers; but Rob, who had observed more closely, explained some of this to him.

"A good many of these people," he said, "are simply drifters who intend to live any way they can. They make a sort of fringe on the last thrust of west-bound settler folk; there is always such a wave goes out ahead of the permanent settlers.

"Not that they can settle this country permanently. They tell me that they raise potatoes even north of here, and, as you know, they raise fine wheat at Chippewyan; but

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this will never be an agricultural country. No, it's the country of the fur trade—always has been, and I hope and believe always will be."

"Well," said John, drawing himself up to his full height, "I'm for a little more excitement. It's getting slow here, watching the people load the boats."

As to what did happen in the way of interest to our travelers, Rob's diary will serve as well as anything to explain their experiences for the next few days:

"Tuesday, June 24th. — Not quite a month out from Athabasca Landing. Have come 553 miles. Steamboat now for the rest of the way north. She is a side-wheeler, pretty big, with several berths and a dining-room. I think she will be pretty well crowded.

"More dogs here. To-day three or four big huskies ate up a little Lapland dog puppy which one of the men had brought along to take home with him. They broke through the bars of the crate and hauled out the puppy and ate him alive! Don't like the looks of them after dark.

"There is a mission school here. The Church people are against fur-hunting.

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I don't see what else the natives can do. If you wanted to buy any fur here you would have to go to the independents and pay a big price. This place had very little to eat left in it when we got here. Not much fish just now, as the river is too high. The cargo of the mission scows is not over the portage yet. Some people of the Anglican Church go north with us, too, also four Northwest Mounted Police, who go to Fort McPherson and Herschel Island. They relieve others who will go out. Lonesome life, I should think.

"Wednesday, June 25th.—Loaded and got off 3 P.M. They call this the Big Slave, then Mackenzie River, but I can't see why it isn't just the same river that starts back in the Rocky Mountains. Passed the little steamboat *St. Marie*. The bishop of this country is on it, also many Indians. Our boat asked him if the ice was out of Great Slave Lake, and he says yes. Tied up very late at night.

"Thursday, June 26th.—Have seen no game. The banks are low and very monotonous. Not very pretty. Most people are playing cards on the boat. No one to talk to but ourselves. Have

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to slow up because the head-wind is filling the scows with water.

"There is very little darkness now, even at midnight, although there is a sort of sunset even yet.

"*Friday, June 27th.*—Tied up twelve miles from Resolution, in delta of the Slave River. Low marshes all around. Some men on the boat, traders and others, took canoe and paddled over to the post.

"*Saturday, June 28th.* — This is my birthday. If I were home might have a cake or something. Other boys and Uncle Dick very nice to me. Went out into the lake, but did not dare to chance the waves, so came back in the channel. Our captain is uneasy because he is afraid the independent traders will get into Resolution before we do. Some competition even here. Wind dropped at 9 P.M. We could have gone on, but the Hudson's Bay always waits if it gets a chance.

"*Sunday, June 29th.*—The *St. Marie* and the *Caribou*, an independent trading-boat, both sighted. Both probably will beat us in to Resolution.

"*Monday, June 30th.*—Loafed another

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day. Other boats passed out at night. We started out late. Pulled the nose out of our sturgeon-nose scow and she began to settle. All that the men and three pumps could do to keep her from sinking. Got her in shallow water at last and tried to patch her up. This was the Fort Nelson cargo, and it is ruined. Boat covered with smeared calico and blankets and everything else, hung up to dry. Pretty mess they will have at Fort Nelson—but this is all they'll have for another year! Nobody seems to care.

"Tuesday, July 1st.—Anchored off Fort Resolution, and went ashore. Indian tepees all over the beach. Hundreds of dogs. Two trading-posts here, a mission school, and a church. Mixed scenes, mostly savage. There is a York boat down from Fort Rae. Says they are starving there. Plenty of fish here. Hudson's Bay boat lost in this race. Independent goods are now eighty miles farther down the river than we are. Left a Mounted Policeman and a scientist here. No Mounted Policeman ever had a horse up here.

"They say that the damaged cargo in the Fort Nelson boat will lose half its

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value. Fort Nelson is up the Liard River, and it takes twenty-five days of tracking from the mouth of the Liard in the Mackenzie.

"As we go down the edge of the Great Slave Lake—the big river runs through it—everything is quiet and the sky is bright. Once in a while we see a belt of clear water now. Have been on muddy water ever since we started out at Athabasca Landing. Fort Resolution as we leave it under the morning sun makes a pretty picture.

"All sorts of people on the boat. One Oxford man, an interpreter and Indian agent, and his five breed children. Another ex-Indian agent who is going north with the last of the treaty payments. These old-timers in the north country tell us all kinds of stories. Wish I had time to put them down. People up here get about one mail a year. One winter mail comes across the mountains from Dawson. They say a mail goes into Fort McPherson from Dawson every winter, too. Three years ago four members of the Mounted Police were lost trying to make it across from McPherson to Dawson. Their names were Inspector

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Fitzgerald, Constables Taylor and Kenny, and Carter, a special constable. They all starved. They are buried at Fort McPherson. Their guide was Carter, and he got lost. The inspector of the Mounted Police who is to go to Fort Herschel was in the Boer War, in Africa, far south of the Equator.

"Uncle Dick tells me that the names of the tribes through which we will pass on our big journey are, first, the Crees, who go as far north as McMurray and Chippewyan; then the Great Chippe-wyan people, scattered here over a big country; then the Dog Ribs, the Yellow Knives, the Slavies, the Mountain Slavies, the Rabbit or Hare people, the Loucheux, and the Eskimos. The Loucheux and the Eskimos lap over along the southern edge of the Arctic. We are among the Dog Ribs here. Their canoes are very small, made out of spruce and birch bark, and so narrow you would not think they could float anything at all. That's as big as they can get the bark up here.

"Now we begin to see sledges and snow-shoes and meat-racks. They have to put everything up high so the dogs can't get them. Dried fish everywhere, or what is

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left of the last winter's supply. Looks like we were in the North at last. Father Le Fèvre told me that at Chippewyan they put up over a hundred thousand 'pieces of fish'—that means a whole fish each—every year for the people and the dogs.

"English mission at Hay River has seventy scholars. They are put in red coats. They live on fish and potatoes. We leave at Hay River the wife of the Anglican minister. There are two young ladies stationed there also. The minister's wife had been gone for two years—outside, as we call it in Alaska. Found a garden here, quite a potato-field, also fresh pie-plant, lettuce, and radishes, all big enough to eat on July 1st. Many fat dogs. Don't know whether the natives eat these or not. This country under the Arctic Ocean is different from what we thought it was—not so cold, and more civilized in some ways.

"Our ex-Indian agent leaves us here to pay treaty money. A young teacher leaves us also here for the Anglican mission. We find here, much to our wonder, on one of the little mission steam-boats which beat us out from Fort Smith

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word from the two good Sisters with whom we traveled on the scows up to Fort McMurray. One was left at Chipewyan and one at Resolution. Here also is the judicial party which we left back at Fort McMurray. They have come down on the *St. Marie*. We say good-by here to Father Le Fèvre. Several church dignitaries about here. The Anglican Church seems more prominent here than at most of the posts.

"I went out with an Indian boy here to run his nets, and we took out an awful lot of fish—one lake trout of thirty-three and a half pounds, and one of twenty-five pounds, five fine whitefish, and four fish that I never saw. The boy called them 'connies.' *Inconnu* is the real name for this fish. The first French *voyageurs* who saw this fish did not know what it was, so they called it 'unknown.' It looks something like a salmon and something like a sucker. Its mouth is rather square. Its flesh is something like that of a whitefish, and it is used a great deal as food. We don't like any fish as well as the whitefish right along. They tell me a lake trout has been caught here weighing forty-four and a half pounds. The boat

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captain says he has seen one weighing sixty-three pounds.

"Our steamer left at 1 A.M., but when well under way remembered that it had forgotten the mail-bags! So we turned around and went back. If we had not done so the people north of here would not have had any mail this year. The Hudson's Bay Company has funny ways.

"Wednesday, July 2d. — Off for Fort Providence. Running better, for scows are lighter loaded now. In the morning came into Beaver Lake, which they say is the head of the true Mackenzie, not at Fort Smith. I suppose the lower point is more correct; at least the other map-makers say so, in spite of what John believes. But it's all one river.

"Many ducks, and this seems a breeding-ground. A great many islands. Shores are broken. The river or lake is about three-quarters of a mile to three miles wide. At 2.40 in the afternoon we got into what they call the Mackenzie River proper. It is only about a half to three-quarters of a mile wide. It is bold and clearer than the other waters we have been traveling on.

"Late in the evening reached the shores

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of Fort Providence, a very sightly spot. The mission school formed their red-clad girls in a platoon on the bank, waiting for us. Every girl had her hands folded in front of her. The boys were in ranks, too. They wore a gray uniform. The balcony of the building back of them was filled with the older girls and with the Sisters in a dark sort of uniform. All the flags were flying. The sun was very bright. This made a striking picture. Crowds of Indians came and sat on the bank, waiting for us to land. A good many tepees on the flat ground. There is a mission garden in a stockade, the best garden we have yet seen. Here there are many onions, potatoes, rhubarb, and a hedge of rose-bushes—a very beautiful sight in this far land, and one I did not think we would find.

“A good many men on the boat are trading with the Indians for bead-work. A pair of moccasins is worth from a dollar to a dollar and a half. One man bought the leggings of a squaw and *off* the squaw—for she was wearing them when he bought them. They say the trade situation here is bad—too much competition. Independents sometimes

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pay three hundred dollars for a silver-gray fox, which is only worth a hundred and twenty-five. The people here are Slavies, and are not much good. The post was out of goods when we got in, and had mighty little fur to send out, too. Indian village starving, living on rabbits and dried fish. No fish running now. These people seem a lazy lot.

"At Fort Resolution there were Chipewyans, Dog Ribs, Slavies, and Yellow Knives, all mixed. At Hay River there were Dog Ribs and Slavies. At Providence they are all Slavies, and the Indian commissioner says they are the worst lot on the whole river. Independent traders very angry here because their clerks have not made any money.

"*Thursday, July 3d.*—On the Mackenzie. Reached the 'head of the line'—that is, the country where they have to track boats on the line. At 3 P.M. reached the mouth of the Liard, which seemed as big as the Peace River. It comes in on the left. A grand scene here. On ahead is Fort Simpson on a very high bluff—the most picturesque spot we have seen yet on this trip. They say they once had electric lights here, but not now. Some

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farms and gardens, much to our surprise. Frost comes about September 1st. They all say there will be a city here some time. Maybe, but I wouldn't like to live there.

"Slavies at this post. Two villages, very wild and barbarous-looking. A great many fine canoes. The life is very wild about us here. One canoe comes in loaded down with rabbits which they have shot along the shores. Much gaudy clothing and savage finery now. Every one wears moccasins. One woman here does fine porcupine-quill work. She is Mrs. McLeod, and is the daughter of Old-man Firth, who is the factor at Fort McPherson, so they say. She is the wife of the factor at Fort Nelson, and knows how to trade. Quill-work costs a lot.

"At this point we lost the wife of an Indian trader who had come this far north with us, also two Mounted Policemen, the ex-Indian agent and his family, a preacher and his son, and several others. The boat company is getting lighter now.

"There was a scow-load of supplies for treaties to be used up the Liard River. Now we find that the Hudson's Bay Company has left all this stuff at Fort

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Smith, away behind us! This shows what sort of transport it is. The Northwest Mounted Police grub, due last April, is not here yet. No wonder this is a starving country. It is very wild and interesting around here. John and Jesse and I are having a splendid time. This is the best trip we ever had.

"We had a bishop on board here. We boys talked quite a while with the post factor. He says there are many records written in the Company books here which go back seventy-five years and more. We bought a few things here which we thought we could take along with us.

"*Friday, July 4th.*—It looked funny to see the British flag, and not the Stars and Stripes, to-day. We three boys celebrated, just the same—we went out in the woods and shot off our rifles several times. Weather is beautiful, soft, and warm. Made many photographs. The river here is about a mile wide.

"We left at 4 P.M., and soon stopped to take on wood. Ran till 8 o'clock before we could begin to see the outlines of the Nahanni Mountains. Suppose they are a spur of the great Rockies wandered

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this far away from home. A veil of smoke seems to hang over them. We boys could not sleep very well, and were up till 1 o'clock looking at the scenery. Uncle Dick has been talking with the captain of our boat about the Nahanni River, which comes down here through a notch in the mountains. The Indians go up to the North Nahanni, portage across to the South Nahanni, run down to the Liard River, and come down it to the Mackenzie. This is a trip no white man has ever taken. It must be a wild country in there. John is honest with his map, so he just marks this place 'Unknown.' Prospectors have gone up the Liard to the Nahanni. The geologists say there is no chance for gold in there.

"Saturday, July 5th.—Fort Wrigley at 7.35 in the morning. One independent post besides the H. B. post. A good deal of fur in these two posts, and some very fine fox skins. The marten seem rather yellow, the lynx good, beaver and bear good. We saw one wolverine skin here, a good many mink, and one otter skin. This otter skin was not cased, as we fixed them in Alaska, but was split and

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stretched like a beaver skin. They say the Indians do that way with their otter here. Did not stop long at this post, as we are beginning to hurry now.

"It is a strange thing to us that we have not seen any game on all this trip. No one has seen a moose since the one that was killed above the Grand Rapids of the Athabasca. I suppose the game country is back in farther. The Indians get plenty of moose for their leather-work.

"In the evening we came to Fort Norman, which marks the entry of the Bear River. I should call that the gate of another land of mystery—up in there somewhere Sir John Franklin perished. They say the white Eskimos are descendants of some of his men. They say a man was taken captive by the Indians up in there, and lived with them several years, and then got out. He lives now somewhere in Saskatchewan.

"At 9.45 we saw a burning bank on the Mackenzie River. It is said to have burned forty-five years. It was in some sort of tar sand, of which we have seen a good deal on our journey. Tied up at 10 o'clock. There is a whole village of Mountain Indians here at the foot of the

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bluff. A wild sight. The tepees are pitched very close together. Hundreds of dogs. Children are eating and running around everywhere. The boat whistled, and the dogs all ran off up the hill and the children screamed. They say that five years ago these wild Indians left this place and went across the mountains to the Stuart River to trade. They brought back Yukon stoves for their tents, the same as they have up in Alaska. They came down the Gravel River here in skin boats. Their birch-bark canoes look like Eskimo kayaks. They have a short deck fore and aft, and sharply slanting stem and stern posts. The bow does not curve back.

“Fort Norman is on a high bluff. The H. B. Company has put in some stairs. Not very many buildings, very little goods, and little fur. We did some trading with the Indians for trinkets. There is an Anglican church here, a very small building. The little bell rang, and our bishop started over to hold services. It was said that these Indians who had come back from the Stuart River wanted to go to church again, so this service was held for them. It was the first time in

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five years in this church. There was a wedding there to-night, they tell me, and several children were christened, three or four years of age. One child was named Woodrow Wilson Quasinay. We did it for a joke, but the parents thought it was a fine name! He was four years old, and very dirty, and cried a good deal when he got his name.

"We are getting to where the sun does not stay down very long. The bishop read his services to-night by the natural light of the window. With the bishop's consent we made a flash-light picture of this scene in the church. Then there was Holy Communion. The services were not done when the whistle of the boat blew and everybody had to run to get on board. The captain scolded the bishop for being so late! This is a funny country, I think.

"This closes a week which has been quite full of events, I think. Jesse and John very happy. The pictures around us seem more savage. We are getting into the Far North of which we have read so much. It is fine!"

IX

UNDER THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

OF the motley assemblages which thronged the capacity of the steamer *Mackenzie River* our three young companions were usually the first to arise in the morning. Morning, however, had come by this time to be a relative term, for the steady progress into the northern latitudes had now brought them almost under the Midnight Sun, so that there was but a brief period of darkness at any hour of the night. On the morning of July 6th they stood conversing on the fore-deck, looking down the vast river as it passed between its bold and broken shores.

"Well," said Rob to the others, "here we are, not quite forty days out from our start, and we have come more than sixteen hundred miles already! We're beginning to add now to our daily mileage, traveling this way day and night."

"Well, even at this rate," rejoined John,

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"I am not sure that I see how we will get out of this northern country inside of our three months' schedule. If we don't, we'll have to pass the winter, won't we?"

Jesse looked a little bit gloomy at this idea. To tell the truth, he, the youngest of the party, was at times just a little homesick. The country through which they passed seemed so stupendous, so awesome, as almost to oppress the spirits of those not used to it.

"Cheer up! Jess," said Rob, clapping him on the shoulder. "There will be something happening now before long. We're almost up to the Arctic Circle, and to-day, if I'm not mistaken, we run into the best scenery on the Mackenzie River, what they call the Ram-parts. The captain was telling me about it yesterday."

They did not, however, reach this portion of their voyage until very late in the evening, when they arrived at the head of that long and gentle bit of water called the Sans Sault Rapids. The river here was about a mile wide, but offered no bad chutes. The captain told them that it only took eight minutes to run through, but that the time coming up with the steamboat usually had averaged one and three-quarter hours.

The strange, luminous twilight of the sub-

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Arctic day continued until midnight. It was, indeed, after eleven o'clock when the steamer struck that narrow shut-in of the Mackenzie River where the great flood, compressed between high and rocky shores, runs steadily and deep for a very considerable distance. Above the actual beginning of the narrower channel lay a great, deep pool, many hundreds of yards wide, while at the right hand of its lower extremity sprang up a bald white rock face of limestone.

So sharp was the bend of the great river here that at the turn it seemed as though the river itself had come to an end or had dropped out of sight. The walls on the left seemed perhaps a trifle higher, ranging in height from one hundred to a hundred and eighty feet, the crest in places broken into crenelated turrets.

"Well," said Rob, "this is the celebrated run of the Ramparts. I must confess I am disappointed. I think the Yukon beats this in a great many places. They may tip this off as a big attraction for tourists, but it's too far to come for the show, in my estimation."

John, busy charting the channel on his map, nodded his head in affirmation. "How wide do you think it is here, Rob?" he asked, and

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Rob was obliged to ask some of the boat officials as to that. They told him that the river was from three hundred to five hundred yards wide at this place, and that there were two great bends in the six miles of the run between the shut-in walls.

"How far is it to the Arctic Circle, Uncle Dick?" demanded Jesse of their leader when finally he came on deck after finishing his work in his state-room.

The latter rubbed his chin for a time before he could reply. "Well," said he, "I don't know just where it is, but it's somewhere on ahead of Fort Good Hope, and we'll strike Fort Good Hope now just beyond the foot of the Ramparts. We'll say that some time in the night we'll pass the Circle."

"Hurrah for that!" exclaimed Rob, and the other boys also became excited.

"What does the Circle look like?" asked Jesse, with much interest.

"Well," replied his uncle, "I don't think it looks like anything in particular. But I think we'll feel the bump when we run over it in the night. I can assure you of that. Also I can assure you that, once you get above it, at the end of our northern journey, you'll see a country different from any you have seen. You hardly realize, no doubt, the great

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extent of this tremendous run from the Rockies to the sea."

Meantime the boat had been continuing its progress steadily. It required about forty-five minutes to complete the run of the bolder part of the shores known as the Ramparts. Once below, there was to be seen, even in the faint midnight light, the scattered buildings of that far-northern post known as Good Hope.

The boys, with all the rest of the passengers, went ashore here and prowled about the curious old place, examining with much interest the mission school, the church, and the garden. Rob was able to make a picture of the interior of the church, putting his camera on a pile of hymn-books and making a long-time exposure.

The post trader told him later something of the history of this curious building which for some time had stood here upon the utmost borders of civilization.

"You see all the decorations and frescoes of the church, just like those in a cathedral of the Old World," said he. "It was all done by a young priest known as Brother Antel, now gone to his rest. The church was built thirty years ago by Bishop Clute, of Little Slave Lake, who brought up Brother Antel

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from that lower mission. The altar is considered an astonishing thing to be found here, almost directly under the Arctic Circle."

They all stood with their hats off in this curious and interesting structure of the Far North, hardly being able to realize that they were now so far beyond the land where such things ordinarily are seen.

"The decorations are fine and the frescoes splendid," said Jesse to John, as they passed outside the door, "but I don't see why Father Antel has the angels playing on the mandolin. I didn't know they had mandolins that long ago."

"Never mind about that, Jesse," said Rob, reprovingly. "You mustn't make light of anything of the kind. You must remember that these Slavie Indians, who are the only people who come here for services, are most impressed by pictures which they can see and understand. I suppose it's all right. At any rate, it's an astonishing thing to find such a church away up here, even if it had angels listening to an H. B. phonograph."

The boat remained at Good Hope all too short a time to suit them, because all our young travelers were anxious to go to the top of a certain hill, from which it was said they could have a view of the Midnight Sun,

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which had disappeared behind the ridge of the hills back of the fort itself. Indeed, one of the crew ascended this eminence, and claimed that he had made a photograph of the Midnight Sun. Certainly, all of the boys were able to testify that it was still light at four o'clock in the morning, for they had remained up that late, eagerly prowling around through the curious and interesting scenes of the far-northern trading-post.

So wearied were they by their long experience afoot on the previous day that on the morning of July 7th they slept a little later than usual, although their total hours of rest were no more than two or three. Uncle Dick was before them on the deck this time, and reproached them very much when they appeared.

"Well, young men," said he, "did you feel any heavy jar, or hear a dull, sickening thud, some time about half an hour or an hour ago?"

"You don't mean that we've passed the Circle, do you, Uncle Dick?" queried John.

"We certainly have. I don't know just where it was. It's seven-thirty o'clock now, and somewhere between here and Fort Good Hope we crossed the Arctic Circle!"

"I can't believe it!" said Rob. "Why,

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look, the weather is perfectly fine, and there isn't any ice to be seen. On the other hand, there are plenty of mosquitoes. What's more, just back at Fort Good Hope we have seen that they can raise things in their gardens. I would never have believed these things about this northern country if I had not seen them myself."

Through the soft, mild light of the sub-Arctic morning the great steamboat churned on her north-bound way. At ten o'clock they passed an Indian village which they were told was called Chicago—no doubt named by some of the Klondikers who were practically cast away here twenty years earlier. John put it down on his map under that name, as indeed it is charted in all the authentic maps of that upper region. They were told that a good number of Indians come here to make their winter hunt.

An uneventful day, during which the boat logged a great many miles in her steady progress, was passed, until at ten o'clock they tied up at the next to the last of the Hudson's Bay posts on the Mackenzie River, known as Arctic Red River, located at sixty-seven degrees and thirty minutes north latitude.

"Oh, look, look, fellows!" exclaimed John, as they pulled into the landing here. "Now

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we're beginning to get some real stuff! I feel as though we were pretty near to the end of the world. Look yonder!"

He pointed to where, along the beach at the foot of the bluff, there lay two encampments of natives.

"Look at the difference in the boats!" exclaimed John, running to the side of the boat. "There are whale-boats with sails, something like those we saw out on the Alaska coast. What are they, Uncle Dick?"

"Those are Eskimos, my young friend," said their leader, "and what you see there are indeed whale-boats. The Huskies come up the river this far to trade with the other Indians, and with the white men at this post. This is about as far as they come. They get their boats in trade from the whale-ships somewhere along the Arctic. As John says, this is really a curious and interesting scene that you see.

"Over yonder, I think, are the Loucheux. I don't think they are as strong and able a class of savages as the Huskies. At least, that's what the traders tell me."

"Well, they've got wall tents, anyway," said Jesse, who was fixing his field-glasses on the encampments. "Where did they get them? From the traders, I suppose. My,

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but they look ragged and poor! I shouldn't wonder if they were about starved."

By this time the boat was coming to her landing, and the boys hurried ashore to see what they could find in this curious and interesting encampment.

There were two trading-posts at Arctic Red River—the Hudson's Bay Company post, and that of an independent trading company, both on top of the high bluff and reached by a stairway which ran part way up the face.

Some of the tribesmen from the encampment now hurried down to meet the boat—tall and stalwart Eskimos in fur-trimmed costumes which the boys examined with the greatest of interest and excitement, feeling as they did that now indeed they were coming into the actual North of which they had read many years before.

"Uncle Dick is right," said Rob. "These Eskimos are bigger and stronger than any of the Indians we have seen. I don't think the women are so bad-looking, either, although the children look awfully dirty."

"It's like Alaska, isn't it?" said John. "Look at the parkies they wear, even here in the summer-time. That's just like the way Alaska Indians and white men dress in the winter-time."

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"Well," said Jesse, "maybe that's the only clothes they've got. "I'll warrant you they have on their best, because this is the great annual holiday for them, when the Company boat comes in."

Rob looked at his watch. "Twelve o'clock!" said he. "I can't tell whether the sun is up yet or not, because it is so cloudy. Anyhow, we can say that we are now under the Midnight Sun, can't we?—because here we are right among the Eskimos."

Uncle Dick joined them after a while, laughing. "Talk about traders!" said he. "No Jew and no Arab in the world would be safe here among these Huskies! They are the stiffest traders I ever saw in my life. You can't get them to shade their prices the least bit on earth.

"These boats," he continued, "are crammed full of white-fox skins and all sorts of stuff—beaver, marten, and mink—and some mighty good fur at that. But those people haven't seen any white men's goods for at least a year, and yet they act as if they hadn't an intention in the world of parting with their furs. Look here," he continued, holding out his hand.

The boys bent over curiously to see what he had.

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"Stone things," said John. "What are they?"

"What they call 'labrets,'" said his uncle, taking up one of the little articles. "They make them out of stone, don't you see?—with a groove in the middle. If you will look close at some of these Eskimo women, or even men, you will find that they have a hole through their lower lip, and some of them wear this little 'labret.' Here also are some made out of walrus ivory."

"Well, now I know what it was I saw that tall Husky have in his face awhile ago," said John. "Something was sticking through his lower lip, and I know now it was the glass stopper of a bottle of Worcester sauce."

Uncle Dick laughed. "Correct!" said he. "I saw the same fellow, and, now that you mention it, I gave him three dollars for that glass stopper from the bottle! I don't suppose any one will believe the story, but it's true."

"If you get a chance to trade any of these Huskies out of one of their pipes, do it, boys," said he, "especially if you can get one of the old bluestone pipe bowls. Pay as much as five dollars for it—which would be ten 'skins' up here. I don't suppose you could find one for a hundred dollars anywhere in the museums of our country, for they are very rare. I have

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my eye on one, and I hope before we get out of this northern country to close a trade for it, but the old fellow is mighty stiff."

"You say that five dollars is ten 'skins' up here, Uncle Dick," commented Rob. "At Fort Smith and Fort Simpson a 'skin' was only thirty cents—three to the dollar."

"That custom varies at the different posts," was Uncle Dick's reply. "Of course you understand that a 'skin' is not a skin at all, but simply a unit of value. Sometimes a trader will give an Indian a bowlful of bullets representing the total value in 'skins' of the fur which he has brought in. Each one of those bullets will be a 'skin.' The Indian doesn't know anything about dollars or cents, and indeed very little of value at all. You have to show him everything in an objective way. So when the Indian wants to trade for white men's goods, he asks for his particular bowl of bullets—which, child-like, he has left with the trader himself. The traders are, however, honest. They never cheat the Indian, in that way at least. So the trader hands down the bowl of bullets. The Indian sees what he wants on the shelves behind the counter, and the trader holds up as many fingers as the value is in 'skins.' The Indian picks out that many bullets from his bowl and hands them

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to the trader, and the trader hands him his goods.

"You can see, therefore, that the Indian's bowlful of bullets in this country would not buy him as much fur as he would have gotten farther down the river. At the same time, this is farther north, and the freight charges are necessarily high. Perhaps there is just a little in the fact that competition of the independents is not as keen here as it is farther to the south!

"But whatever be the price of a 'skin,'" Uncle Dick went on, somewhat ruefully, "these Huskies take it out of us cheechackos when we come in. We passed the last of the Slavies at Fort Good Hope. Now we are among the Loucheux. But these Huskies run over the Loucheux as if they were not there."

There was plenty of time given to the passengers at this landing to visit the boats and encampments of the natives, so that our young investigators were able to obtain considerable information about the methods of the country.

They went aboard one whale-boat and discovered that its owner, a stalwart Husky, had brought in a hundred marten and a hundred mink, and half as many white foxes

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and lynx. He explained that he was going to buy another whale-boat of the Hudson's Bay Company, and that he had to pay yet seventy marten, besides all this other fur, in order to get his boat, which would be delivered to him next year. The boys figured that he was paying about twenty-five hundred dollars for an ordinary whale-boat, perhaps thirty years old, and, inquiring as to the cost of such a boat along the coast, found that it rarely was more than about three or four hundred dollars new!

"Well," said Rob, "I can begin to see how there's money in this fur business, after all. A sack of flour brings twenty-five dollars here. A cup of flour sells for one 'skin,' or fifty cents. These people, Huskies and all, know the value of matches, and they jolly well have to pay for them. I've been figuring, and I find out that the traders make about five thousand per cent. profit on the matches they sell in the northern country. Everything else is in proportion."

Uncle Dick grinned at them as they bent over their books or notes. "Well," he said, "you remind me of the methods of old White-man, a trader out in the western country where I used to live. People used to kick on what he charged for needles and thread,

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and he always pointed out to them that the freight in that western country was very heavy indeed. I suppose that's the answer of the Hudson's Bay Company to the high cost of living among the Eskimos."

"How much farther north are we going, Uncle Dick?" asked Rob, suddenly. "I mean, how soon do we leave the steamboat?"

"Quicker than you will like," said he. "This is the next to the last stop that we'll make. On ahead eighty miles is good old Fort McPherson, on the Peel River, and that is as far as we go. From this time on you can make the memorandum on your photographs and your notes in your diary that you are working under the Midnight Sun and north of the Arctic Circle!"

"I didn't think we would ever be here!" said John, drawing a long breath. "My, hasn't it been easy, and hasn't it been quick? I can hardly realize that we have got this far away from home in so little a while."

"Yes," said Rob, "when we were back there loafing around on the portages and in some of the more important stops I began to think we were going to be stranded up here in the winter-time. Well, maybe we'll get through yet, Uncle Dick. What do you think?"

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“Maybe so,” replied Uncle Dick. “And now, if you’ve got your pictures all fixed up, I think you’d better turn in. You’ve got to remember that you sleep by the clock up here, and not by the sun.”

X

FARTHEST NORTH

“LOOK!” cried Rob to his two companions as they stood on the far deck of the steamboat. “Look yonder!”

He was pointing on ahead through the low-hanging mist and drizzling rain which had marked the last few hours of their last day of steamboat travel.

“What is it?” demanded Jesse, also crowding toward the bow.

“I know. It’s the Rockies!” cried John. “Uncle Dick told me that those mountains were the most northerly spur of the Rocky Mountains. It’s where they go farthest north. So, fellows, we’ve been somewhere, haven’t we? Uncle Dick was right—this is the greatest trip we’ve had, as sure as you’re born.”

“But look yonder on ahead,” resumed Jesse. “What river is that we’re turning into now?”

The booming whistle of the great steamer had called his attention to the fact that they

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were now altering their course. The *Mackenzie River* was entering the narrow mouth of a swift stream against which it took all their power to make any headway at all.

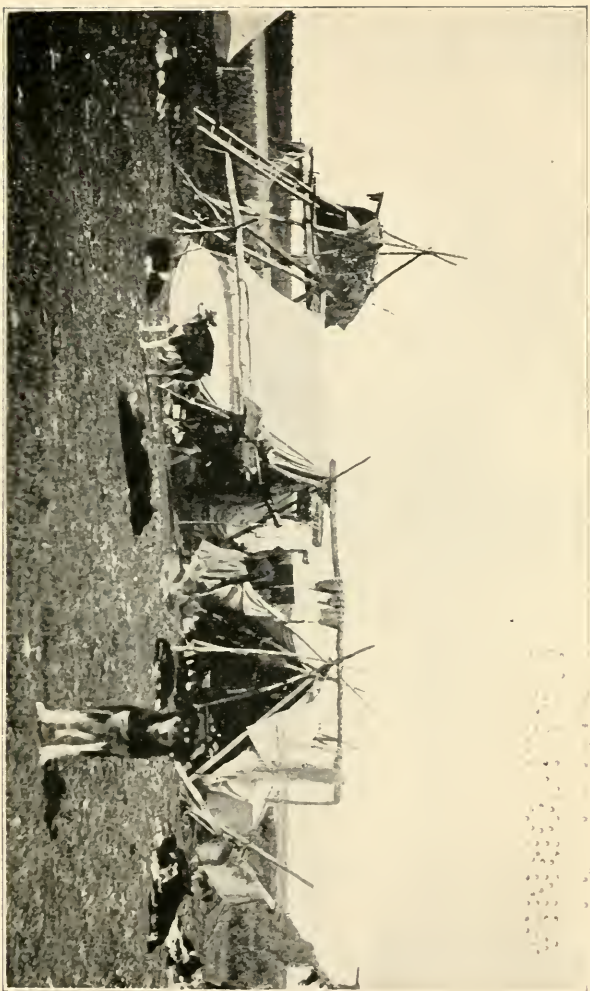
Along the banks of this river the trees seemed to be growing taller and stronger, whether willows or spruces that lined the banks, and the shores themselves were bolder.

"Call Uncle Dick," said Rob. "He's writing in his room. He knows all about this, I expect."

So they called Uncle Dick and asked him about the new river.

"Yes," said he, "this is the Peel River. It comes down out of the Rockies, as you see. You are now pretty near to the upper end of the whole entire Rocky Mountain system. We are going to cross the most northerly part of the Rockies, and the lowest pass—it is only about a thousand feet above sea-level, and only about a hundred miles south of the Arctic Sea itself.

"This river here, the Peel," he continued, "no doubt offered the old traders a better building-site for a post than the big river would have done below the mouth. The Mackenzie wanders on down for a hundred miles through its delta. Of course the natives trap all through this country for a hundred



AN ENCAMPMENT OF ESKIMOS ON THE BEACH AT FORT MCPHERSON

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miles or more, but they tell me the site of Fort McPherson is a favorite one with them, and they all know it. Pretty soon we'll be there."

It was about 3.15 of that same day, according to Rob's diary, when at last the steamboat, after gallantly bucking the stiff current of the Peel River for some hours, pulled in at the foot of a high bank at the summit of which there was located the most northerly of all the Hudson's Bay posts, and the one with least competition to-day—old Fort McPherson of venerable history.

On the narrow beach at the foot of the hill lay an encampment of Eskimos, their huts rudely built of hides, pieces of wall tents, and canvas stretched over tepee-like frames. Several of their whale-boats, well rigged and well cared for, lay moored to the bank. All along the beach prowled the gaunt dogs which belonged to the Eskimos, and yet other young dogs were tied to stakes so that they might not escape.

These stalwart savages, twenty or thirty of them, came now and joined the motley throng which crowded down to the boat landing. Here might be seen the grizzled old post trader who had been here for forty years, and near to him the red uniforms of a pair

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of Mounted Policemen who were waiting for this boat to take them back to civilization. A few others of the mounted force, one or two nondescripts, and a scattered and respectful fringe of Loucheux Indians who held back at the rear went to make up the strange throng who greeted the last and only boat of the year.

It was a great event for these far-northern dwellers when the steamer came. A great event it was, too, for these young adventurers who had gone north with the brigade, who now had seen that brigade dwindle and scatter over more than fifteen hundred miles of unknown country; and who now saw the remnant of the brigade proper, one steamboat and a scow, come to anchor here at the farthest north of the fur trade of this continent!

The boys were quickly on shore, running around with their cameras among the savages. They found the Huskies, as they always were called, a much more imposing tribe than any of the Indians they had seen. The men were taller and more robust, more fearless and self-respecting, even arrogant in their deportment. The women were a strapping lot. Some of them wore the blue line tattoo on the lower lip, showing them to be married women; others, young girls not uncomely to look upon.

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All were clad in the fur garments of the North, even though it now was summer-time, the date of their arrival being July 8th. Over the fur garments most of them wore a dirty cotton covering, supposedly to keep their fur garments clean. The women usually slipped their arms out of the sleeves of their loose, chemise-like jackets, so that with their double coverings it was sometimes difficult to tell where they kept their hands.

To the surprise of the boys, the Eskimos insisted on receiving money or presents of some kind before they would allow themselves to be photographed. They were willing to trade, but, as their Uncle Dick had warned them, they proved to be most avaricious traders. A "labret" of ivory or even of wood they valued at four or five dollars—or asked so much as that at first. A bone-handled drill, made of a piece of seal rib with a nail for a point to the drill, was priced accordingly. A pair of mukluks, or native seal boots, was difficult to find at all, while as for the furs with which their boats were crowded they professed indifference whether or not any one purchased them.

"Wait awhile," said Uncle Dick. "Be as indifferent as they are. About the time the boat turns around to go back south again

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you'll see them begin to trade. I might have bought my bluestone pipe if I'd had time."

"I'll tell you," said Jesse. "That big fellow down there—I call him Simon—he's got one of those bluestone pipe bowls that you told about. He says it's old, and he wants ten dollars for it. They understand what a dollar is; they don't trade in skins like these other tribes."

"Well, you see," said Uncle Dick, "these men all have met the whale-boats which come around through Bering Sea. They know more about the white men's ways than the inland tribes. As you see, they are a much superior class of people."

"That's so," said Rob, who was just back from photographing among the Loucheux villages located on top of the hill, timidly remote from the Eskimos. "Those people up on the hill are about starving, and so ragged and dirty I don't see how they live at all."

"They've got religion, just the same," said John. "I've been down making a picture of the mission church. I bought two hymn-books for one 'skin' each of the native preacher. Here they are, all in the native language, don't you see? And I bought a Book of Common Prayer, printed in Loucheux, too."

"Well, I've got three bone fish-hooks and

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a drill," said Jesse, triumphantly. "I don't know whether I'll have any money left before long. You see, it's hard to wait till the boat starts back, because some one else might get these things before we do."

"Is any one going out?" asked Rob.

"Yes, the inspector of the Mounted Police and one man are going out—the first time in two years," replied Jesse, proud of his information. "Two new men that came with us are going up to Herschel Island. There is a four-man post up here, with the barracks beyond the trader's house. They have to travel a hundred miles or so in the winter-time, and it's more than a hundred miles by boat from here to Herschel Island. The Inspector of Police who is going down there told me he was going to hire one of these Huskies to take him down in his whale-boat."

"They tell me the old trader has not been outside for more than forty years, or at least not more than once," added Rob to the general fund of information. "He came from the Scotch Hebrides here when he was young, and now he's old. He has a native Indian wife and no one knows how many children running around up there."

"I suppose he's going to take care of the district inspector who came down from Fort

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Simpson with us on the boat," ventured John, who had made good friends with the latter gentleman in the course of the long voyage.

"Well," said Jesse, dubiously, "it looks to me like there was going to be a celebration of some sort. All the white men have gone up to the trader's house, and they don't come out. I could hear some sort of singing and going-on in there when I came by."

Rob smiled, not altogether approvingly. "It's easy to understand," said he. "All these people at the trading-posts wait for the boat to come. It's their big annual jamboree, I suppose. There's many a bottle of alcohol that's gone up the hill since this boat landed, I can promise you that; and it's alcohol they drink up here. Some one gets most of the Scotch whisky before it gets this far north."

"They won't let them trade whisky to the natives, though; that's against the law of Canada," said John. "The first thing this old Simon man down the beach asked for was whisky. As for the Loucheux, I don't suppose they ever see any—and a good thing they don't."

"Did you see the dishpan that old girl with the blue lip had in front of her place?" inquired Jesse, after a time. "She had taken a rock and pounded a hole down in the hard

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ground. Then she poured water in that. That's their dishpan — and I don't think they have changed the water for a week!"

"I should say not!" said Rob. "I wouldn't want to live in that camp, if I could help it. Did you see how they eat? They don't cook their fish at all, but keep it raw and let it almost spoil. Then you can see them—if you can stand it—sitting around a bowl in a circle, all of them dipping their hands into the mess. Ugh! I couldn't stand to watch them, even."

"There's a good-looking wall tent down the beach, though," continued Rob, "and I don't know whether you've been there or not. There's a white man by the name of Storckenberg there—a Scandinavian sailor that has drifted down here from some of the boats for reasons best known to himself. He tells me he's been among the Eskimos for quite a while. He's married to a sort of half-breed Eskimo woman—she's almost white—and they've got one little baby, a girl. Rather cute she was, too."

"It's funny how people live away up here," mused Jesse. "I didn't know so many queer things could happen this far north. Why, there seems to be a sort of settlement here, after all, doesn't there?"

"They have to live through the winter,"

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smiled John, "if they don't go back on that boat. It will be here for a few days, and when she turns back it's all off for a full year.

"There's an independent trader with a boat-load of furs which he is going to take out over the Rat Portage and into the Yukon, the same way that we are going," volunteered John, also after a little. "I've been down talking with him. He says it will take ten days from here to the summit, the best we can do, and as to when we can start no one can tell. Uncle Dick told me we would have to wait for our supplies until the general annual jamboree cooled down a little bit. Then we will get our canoe off the boat and rig her up."

Jesse stood with his hands in his pockets, looking about the motley scene surrounding them. "I don't care much for the fur trade," said he, slowly, after a time. "It looks all dirty, and it's a cruel thing. I don't like to trap things, anyhow, very much any more since I got older. Besides, it doesn't look nice to me. These people are so poor they can barely live from one year to the next, and the Company could have changed that in a hundred years if it had wanted to."

"Well, there's the mission-work among them even here," commented Rob. "That

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gives them a little bit more life. They learn how to read a little bit sometimes, and they get to using the needle better than they did before. It helps them make things they can sell—moccasins and bead-work—don't you think?"

"Huh!" said Jesse. "Much money they get out of that. When that boat's gone their market's gone for the full year, isn't it? No, I don't like it. Of course I'm glad we've come up here and seen all this—I wouldn't have missed it for the world. But now I know more about the great fur companies than I ever did before. Old ones or new ones, they all look alike to me, and I don't like them."

"Well," said Rob, "if everything was just the way we left it back home, there wouldn't be any fun in going traveling anywhere in the world. It's the strangeness of this and the wildness that make it interesting, isn't it?"

"And we *are* in a strange, wild country," he continued. "Where else can you go in all the world and find as many new and out-of-the-way places as this? From where we stand here you can go over east into a country that no white man knows about. We have passed beyond the place where Sir John Franklin was lost. If you go southwest you

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can get to Dawson, maybe—there's the tombstones of the four Mounted Policemen who tried to get across from Dawson and didn't. I've got a photograph of their tombstones; the men just hauled them up the hill with dogs to-day and put them up not more than an hour ago.

"And then," he went on, "north of here runs the Arctic, with who knows what beyond the shore-line. South and west of the place where we will cross the Canadian and American line there's a lot of country no man knows much about. And everywhere you looked as we came through, east and west of the big river, there was country that was mapped, but with really little known of it. The Liard has been mapped, but that's all you can say about it. The only way to travel through this country is on the rivers, and when you are on one of these rivers you don't have much time to see beyond the banks, believe me."

"Well, it's kept me mighty busy with my little old map," said John, "changing directions as much as we have. I wanted to ask you, Rob, whether I've got the distances all right. Why not check up on the jumps in our whole journey from the start to here, where we are at the end of the trail?"

"All right," said Rob, and produced his

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own memorandum-book from his pocket. "I've got the distances here, the way they were given to me by the government men:

"From Athabasca Landing to Pelican Portage was one hundred and twenty miles; to the Grand Rapids, one hundred and sixty-five miles; to McMurray, two hundred and fifty-two miles; to Chippewyan, four hundred and thirty-seven miles; to Smith's Landing, five hundred and thirty-seven miles; to Fort Smith, below the portage, five hundred and fifty-three miles; to Fort Resolution on Great Slave Lake, seven hundred and forty-five miles; to Hay River, eight hundred and fifteen miles; to Fort Providence, nine hundred and five miles; to Fort Simpson, ten hundred and eighty-five miles; to Fort Wrigley, twelve hundred and sixty-five miles; to Fort Norman, fourteen hundred and thirty-seven miles; to Fort Good Hope, sixteen hundred and nine miles; to Arctic Red River, eighteen hundred and nineteen miles; to Fort McPherson, eighteen hundred and ninety-nine miles. That's the way we figured it out at first, and I guess it's about as accurate as any one can tell," he concluded.

John was setting down these figures and doing a little figuring on the margin of his paper. "We left on May twenty-ninth," said

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he, "and got here July eighth—forty days into two thousand miles—that makes fifty miles a day we've averaged, including all the stops. You see that fifty miles a day, kept up, gets you into the thousands in time, doesn't it? After we struck the steamboat we began to raise the average."

"Well," said Jesse, looking off to the dull-brown slopes of the tundra-covered mountains which lay to the westward, "if what that trader-man told me is true, we'll slow down considerably before we get to the top of that pass in the Rockies yonder."

They were all sitting on the crest of the bluff of Fort McPherson landing, where a long log slab, polished by many years of use, had been erected as a sort of lookout bench for the people who live the year around at Fort McPherson.

"What time is it, Rob?" asked Jesse, suddenly.

Rob pulled out his watch. "It's eleven-thirty," said he. "Get the cameras, boys! Here's a good place for us, right here at the end of the bench. It's almost midnight. Look over there!"

The three of them looked as he pointed. The Midnight Sun of the Arctic hung low on the horizon, but not lower now than it

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had been for some time. Its rays, reflected from the surface of the Peel River just beyond, shone with a pale luster such as they had never before known.

With some sort of common feeling which neither of them could have explained, each of the three boys took off his cap and laid it on the bench beside him as he stood looking at that strange spectacle given to so few travelers to see—the unsinking Midnight Sun!

XI

THE MIDNIGHT SUN

IT was two o'clock in the morning. There had been no night. The sun had not sunk at all beyond yonder dark, ragged fringe of the spruce-trees marking the horizon. Not even the lower edge of its disk had been broken by the top of the tallest spruce-tree. Yes, for one of the few remaining nights of that year it had been given to our young travelers to see the Midnight Sun at its lowest point.

It was a strange sun, so it seemed to them all. After it had sunk far off to the left of the Peel River it seemed to hang there for a time, and then to go, not in the arc of a circle, but almost in a line parallel with the level of the earth plane, passing with considerable rapidity from left to right in its course. Its reflection upon the water of the Peel River, very noticeable at first, changed until by and by there was no reflection left at all and it had

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passed off across the spruce forest upon the right bank of the river. There again it seemed to hang, as in its upward course it began to forsake its semi-contact with the level of the earth's sphere. For these few days at this latitude it would make its circle in what Rob called the northwest corner of the heavens, striving to give these poor natives who live in that land some sort of compensation for the terrible sunless nights of the immeasurable Arctic winter.

Our young adventurers, be sure, had lost no time in this fine opportunity for photography—an opportunity given to very few travelers of any age or climate at this particular spot; for since the great Klondike rush had straggled through, broken and failing, twenty years before, few white persons indeed had ever stood upon these shores.

"Run, Jesse, to our tent upon the beach!" called out John. "I'm out of films. Get all we've got. We'll have to try and try again, so as to be sure we're not missing anything."

"That's right," said Rob. "We don't know much about this light. It's soft and faint, but it seems to cut the film, after all, as near as I can tell. I'm going to make all sorts of times—from three seconds and five seconds and ten seconds up to twenty and

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thirty seconds; and with each of these times that I give it I'm going to use a different stop. Somewhere, some of us will get a picture, I'm sure of that."

"Well," said John, looking at Jesse's hurrying form as he scurried down the steep path to their tent upon the beach, "it would be too bad to come this far and then fail."

It may be added that the boys did not fail, for certainly they brought out from their trip what then were known as the best amateur negatives ever made in that latitude; and of all the trophies of their northern trips they have prized none so much as these pictures of their own, of that strange spectacle of the great, mysterious North.

It was late that night, or early that morning, when at length they closed their labors with the cameras, all fairly content. Uncle Dick had left them to their own devices, feeling that if they got results—as he felt sure they would—they would feel all the more proud for having done so without the advice and aid of one older than themselves. Indeed, he was beginning more and more to trust these young lads to their own devices. Himself occupied with matters of business which kept him very largely about the government office — as might have been called

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the log barracks of the Northwest Mounted Police which made the only representative of the law in that far-off land—he for some time after the landing of the boat allowed the boys to shift pretty much for themselves, with what results we have seen.

They had pitched their tent farther down the beach than the lowest Eskimo hut, and had in this case put up the great mosquito tent, which stood eight feet high and had windows like a house. Into this, late that night, they now crawled, one after another, through the sleeve of the tent.

"My!" exclaimed Jesse, "I never saw such mosquitoes in my life as these little black fellows! There are simply clouds of them all along the beach here, and they follow you wherever you go."

They all stood up inside the tent before preparing for bed in their blanket rolls.

"Take your socks, fellows," said Rob. "We'll have to kill every one in the tent, or they won't let us sleep to-night. Jesse's right; these little fellows bite worse than anything I've seen yet. I vow, when I came into the tent they almost scared me when they lit on my head and neck!"

"That trader and his wife didn't seem to mind them so much," said John, scratching

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his own neck rather seriously. "She's a white woman, too—Norwegian, I think some one told me—at least she speaks somewhat broken. She's a nice woman, too, and I don't see how she stands it up in this country."

"Her husband told me this is their third winter in the North," answered Rob. "They say it takes two or three years to get used to these things, and then you sort of quiet down and get resigned."

"Or else you die!" grumbled John. "We don't know how many people there are that don't get resigned."

"How long is the boat going to be here yet, Rob?" queried Jesse, sitting up on his bed and unlacing his moccasins.

"Until the jamboree is ended and all the fur is bought from the Huskies," replied Rob, seriously. "Maybe two or three days yet—I don't know. There'll be plenty of time for us to look around a bit to-morrow, and even later. Meantime, Uncle Dick has got to get the supplies ready for our canoe. We're a long ways from home yet. We're not going back when the steamer goes, young chaps; you'd better remember that!"

"Huh! Who cares?" said Jesse, contemptuously, pulling his blanket over his head. "I'm not afraid. We'll get through somehow."

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As Rob had said, they had ample time the next day to look about them in this strange and interesting environment into which they had now come. The unloading of the boat went on steadily, the slow stream of breeds, stooping under their heavy loads, passing up the steep bluff from the boat landing to the trading-post. The boys had time to prowl along the beach and watch the natives run their nets, and even pursue their native art of hunting; for that morning, hearing shots from the bank, they looked out to see a half-dozen native kayaks hurrying to a point out in the river where a black object bobbing up was seen now and then. It was, in fact, a beaver which had been spied. On the bank a half-breed was shooting at it with a rifle, while the Huskies were crowding around, endeavoring to spear it when it came to sight. At last a lucky shot from the rifleman brought an end to the chase. A Husky drove a spear into the body of the dead beaver, and they came ashore with it, all of them shouting and singing and flinging up their paddles or their spear-shafts as they raced ahead.

"Look at those boats," said Rob, always observant. "In the last five hundred miles we have seen the birch-bark canoe change into a kayak, haven't we?"

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"That's right," said John. "First there was the Cree canoe, with the high bow and stern rolling in—much as you could see in Canada anywhere. Then, as the trees got smaller, birch bark scarcer, in the Dog Rib and Rabbit country, the boats got narrower. I wouldn't have liked to get into one. But they didn't waste any bark rolling the ends in; the ends came up sharp, as in the kayak."

"Yes, and at Arctic Red River," said Jesse, remembering, "they had just a little deck—not much of a one. And now here they are made out of skin and decked all over except a little hole in the middle."

"And if you'll look at these Eskimos," said Rob, again, "and then think of how those Chippewyans looked, you'll have to admit that they both have the same look and that they both look Japanese. I saw Chippewyans that looked like Japs to me, and that was 'way south of here. I suppose maybe some writers are correct, and that a good many of the tribes, if not all of them, came across the Bering Sea once upon a time, long ago."

"Uncle Dick is going to get a couple of Indian boys here, Loucheux, to help us up to the divide," said John. "He told me that to-day. He's out of patience with the delay here and crazy to get started, but he couldn't

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get any supplies. The Hudson's Bay say that they lost a scow somewhere which ought to have come in here and didn't come. The Northwest Mounted Police claim that all their bacon is missing. The Indians say they are starving and have to have something for their children. How we'll get beans enough to carry us across Uncle Dick can't say."

"Well, leave it to Uncle Dick," said Jesse. "I know he'll fix it all right some way, and we'll get through, too."

"That's the talk, Jesse," said Rob, slapping a hand on his shoulder. "You've got more nerve than you had when you started, and you weigh ten pounds more, too. I'll warrant that you'll be the lead dog on the tow-line going up the Rat."

Thus occupied, they passed the time all too rapidly. In the late evening of their second day the boys noticed a strange hurrying among all the population at the crest of the bluff and on the beach below. Some sort of warning seemed to be in the air; an instant later it became audible in the deep, booming whistle of the steamboat which lay moored below.

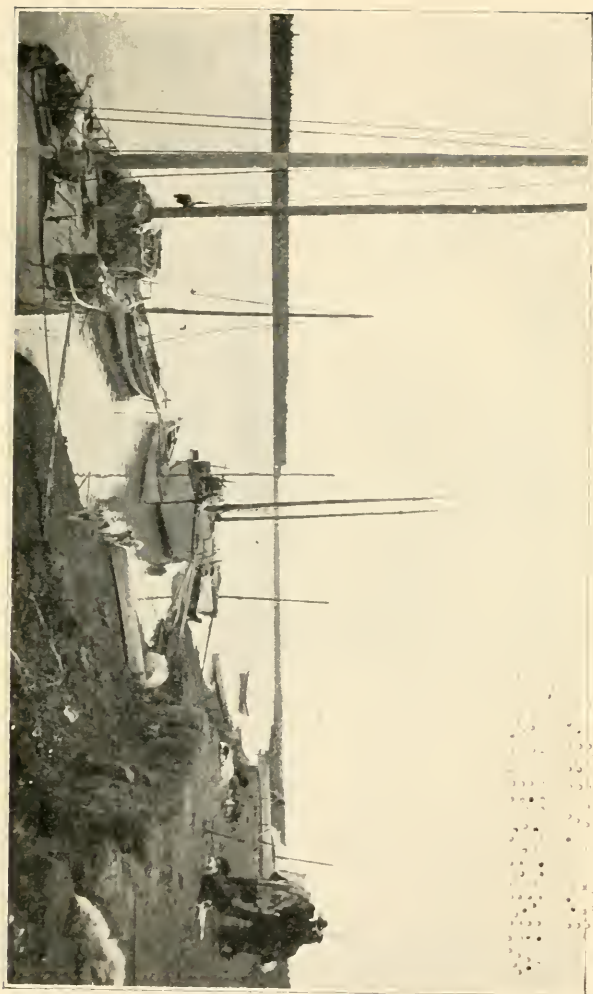
The *Mackenzie River*, last unit of the modern fur brigade, was ready to turn back from her farthest north and take up her weary way

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once more, bucking the tremendous current of the Mackenzie River for more than a thousand miles to the southward.

Again and again the whistle's echoes rang along the steep shore, and here and there whites and natives, all the tribesmen, every unit of the motley population of the place, hurried down to the landing, until the narrow beach was packed. Men shouted and waved to others now gone aboard the boat. The two red-clad police officers now going back home smiled their pleasure at the thought of the long journey that lay ahead of them; whereas the two who took their place stood looking upon them somewhat ruefully, but bravely as they might, facing their own two years of exile, during which they would never again see a white face until they themselves were relieved. A few Huskies now came hurriedly, offering bargains in their coveted white-fox skins, and some of the great Arctic mink which had not yet all been traded even by the shrewd district agent who had come north with the steamer to see after this particular portion of the territory of his Company, always so prolific in good furs.

Men joked and chaffed each other here and there across the narrow strip of water. Dogs howled each time the whistle blast rang out.



HUSKY FLEET—FORT McPHERSON

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A few enthusiasts on the top of the bank wasted precious ammunition in a salute. A few cronies drank a parting stirrup cup out of their scant remaining alcoholic stores. Yonder the Eskimos now began to man their whale-boats for their long voyage to the Arctic Sea. The women were packing up their own supplies now, herding the dogs together, pulling the kayaks up on the decks of the sailing-schooners. The great event of the year was coming to its close and camp was breaking. Now the head of the brigade, this unit farthest north, must begin its long and laborious passage southward once more against the current. As it had brought north such store as was possible of bulky goods, now it carried back, tight packed in its hold, the bales of the precious fur, so much less bulky than the goods which had been brought north, and so far more valuable.

The old trader, gray, grizzled, and taciturn, who had done his Company the service of accumulating all this store of fur, stood leaning against the beam of the great fur-press which but now had been busy in baling the precious white-fox fur, the mink and marten, of this great and solitary country of the North. He would not again see a civilized face until that time in the following

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year, if he still were living then. He made no comment, nor did the swarthy men of his immediate command who stood about him, grim and taciturn, and disdaining to show the emotion of a salute to the passing crew of the *Mackenzie River*.

But at last the conclusion of all these partings came. All the government men and Company men who were going out went on board ship. The bell jingled under the hand of the captain in his pilot-house above. The strong-armed breeds hauled in the gang-plank, and with a parting shrill salute the steamer began to swing her nose into the current of the Peel.

Majestically she turned about to pick up the current for her brief run down that stream to the great river which she was now to ascend. The boys on the bank plied their cameras as she swung midstream, and worked them yet further as the Eskimo whale-boats fell in her wake.

By and by the last cheering ceased to be heard. A blank silence fell upon all those remaining on the bank. The three young lads looked from one to the other, looked again at the silent face of the tall and sun-bronzed man who was to lead them out of this country now. A sudden melancholy had fallen upon

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them all. The silence, the mystery of the great North, seemed now to envelop them. They felt strangely alone—indeed, if truth were told, strangely sad and helpless. Home—how very far away it seemed! John poked a swift elbow into Jesse's side, for it seemed to him he had caught just a suspicion of a tear in the corner of that young traveler's eye.

And now, late in what should have been the evening of the Arctic day, there arose, as if expressive of the thought in the minds of all, that strangest and most mournful sound that comes to the ears of man—the united howling of the dogs of the Far North.

There may have been two or three hundred of them in all, perhaps more, in the Loucheux village and the remainder of the Eskimo encampment, but all of them in unison, if not in accord, raised their voices in a tremulous wail which fairly made the blood run cold.

It was the voice of the far-off, mysterious, and unconquered North!

XII

THE RAT PORTAGE

BEFORE our young adventurers now lay the most dangerous part of their entire journey in the northern wilderness—that famous Rat Portage over the Rockies, at which, twenty years earlier, so many parties bound for the Klondike met disaster. Our young friends had no guides to lead them through this unknown country, any more than had the first Klondikers in the gold stampede which came down the Mackenzie and undertook to get across to the Yukon. No map of that region existed, or at least not in the knowledge of any of our party. They were, therefore, as helpless as any explorers ever were in any portion of the world, and were about to venture into a country as wild as any upon the North American continent.

It was no wonder, then, that their leader, himself a wise and cautious man and well versed in all the expedients of outdoor life,

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hesitated and pondered, as, standing upon the high crest of Fort McPherson boat landing, he looked out to the low, dull slopes of the Rockies, far ahead. He had heard all the stories about this risky undertaking, and had been cautioned repeatedly by the old trader at Fort McPherson against endeavoring to get through with no companions but these young boys. He knew that his supplies would be no more than sufficient, and that there was no place to get further supplies. Above all, he pondered over the dissimilarity of opinions expressed about the distances and difficulties of the proposed route across the Rockies. Some said it was a hundred miles to the summit, others said seventy-five, others a hundred and forty. Some said it would take a week to get to the top, others two weeks, others three, and yet others said it could not be done at all. Some said there was one lake at the portage on the summit, others said there were five. No one could give any clear idea of the country that lay out yonder beyond the dull, brown tundra.

It was a mysterious land, potent with difficulties and possibly alive with dangers. Uncle Dick loved these young companions of his beyond all price, and he knew his own responsibility in undertaking to lead them

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through. At times he regretted the whole journey as a mad enterprise which never ought to have been taken on. But at length, like any born leader, he pitted the difficulties against the privileges, made his decision; and, having made it, adhered to it.

"We'll start, boys," said he, "and start to-morrow."

Since, therefore, these young travelers did make this dangerous journey which had proved impossible for so many older *voyageurs*, it may be well to allow Rob to tell in his own fashion the story of their crossing of the Rockies on the old Rat Portage. Rob kept his notes from day to day during the remainder of their stay at Fort McPherson.

"*Sunday, July 13th.*—Cloudy and overcast. Lucky we got our pictures of the Midnight Sun—this is about the last chance. We have been living at the Mounted Police barracks. The old trader keeps to his own house. Uncle Dick says he was to get us our supplies. We have mended the canoe we brought down on the steamboat. Not very big for four of us. Uncle Dick says he has got two Loucheux Indian boys, Johnny and Willy, to meet us at the mouth of the

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Rat River and help us to track up that river to the top. Uncle Dick seems uneasy. We told him not to bother about us. The independent trader with a scow of furs is going to try to get across. We ought to beat them over.

"Wednesday, July 16th. — Such fuss and fooling around nobody ever saw. But we're on our way with at least some supplies. Glad we brought a shot-gun and a fishing-rod. Off at 4.15. At 7.30 reached a creek coming into the Husky River from a chain of lakes. Never saw so many fish in my life as there were of the 'connies.' We caught plenty for a day or so. Mosquitoes bad in camp. Rain.

"Friday, July 18th. — Late start, 10.30. At 1.30 made the mouth of the Rat and picked up the two Indians. This famous stream is a deep, narrow creek. Mosquitoes the worst I ever saw. Ate lunch in headnets. Have to write with gloves on. Current sluggish. We still can paddle upstream. It is at least seventy-five miles, possibly a hundred, to the top.

"At 11.15 thought we were near Destruction City, the old Klondike camp where so many died. Some women win-

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tered here. Must have been an awful bunch of tenderfeet. We are maybe ten to fifteen miles above the mouth of the Rat. Shores sandy and covered with willows. Cooked a pot of beans. We have a few beans, a little tea, some dried fruit, a little flour, and some side-meat for grease. Not much more. Fish are said to be plenty, also plenty of ptarmigan and rabbits farther up. Pretty tired to-night. Have done maybe twenty miles.

"Saturday, July 19th.—Current stiffer. Passed a creek coming from Black Mountains. Shores began to change in the afternoon. Tundra coming down to banks. Began to see rocks on shore—glad to see them after so much mud and willow flats. At 4 P.M. made Destruction City—probably twenty-five miles above the mouth of the Rat. Going slower than we thought, as we hoped to make this yesterday. Caught some big trout, very fine to eat. They take the fly splendidly. At 5 P.M. we laid aside the paddles and had to begin to track. The Indians are patient now, and very useful. Tracking is beastly hard work. You put a collar around your breast and shoul-

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der. We had to walk in the water. Uncle Dick and the Indians and I took turns. John steered pretty well. All got our feet and legs wet a hundred times. Jesse went along shore most of the way. The canoe rode light, and we made pretty good time.

"Sunday, July 20th.—Mosquitoes still with us. Rain lets up. We have been sleeping pretty wet, but don't mind. Rerigged our tracking-line. Got some pictures. Started at 10.30 and traveled nearly five hours to foot of a bad rapid above a deep pool. Camped on a beach. Made a big fire to dry our clothes. We are wet all the time, all of us. Jesse shot three rabbits. He hunts while we track the boats. We don't let him get out of sight very far. I saw one lynx to-day. Astonishing how little game we have been seeing on this whole trip in this big wild country. Saw an abandoned Klondike camp. They say they are scattered through all these woods here. Sometimes they have found skeletons since. A boy was lost in here and found dead. Traces of the big Klondike migration now getting scarce. Saw some iron on the beach, and ax marks on trees.

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"Monday, July 21st. — Heavy going. Hard strain on all of us. Think this would try the best sort of man if he had heavy supplies along in his boat. We have to hurry or we won't have enough to eat. Lunch at 2 P.M. Saw the mountains far ahead. A great sight. They seem not more than twenty-five miles. Indian boys very useful, quiet, and patient. One says he paid twenty-five dollars for his hat at the trading-post. It was worth about two dollars in the States. Saw some blazed trees. This was written on one, 'Colin's rifle in tent here 25th.' Don't know what this meant, but suppose a party had split and some gone ahead, and left word. Gum had grown all over the writing. Saw some more sled irons. Jesse got eight rabbits and two ptarmigan. We make a stew and keep putting more things in it as we travel along.

*'Tuesday, July 22d.—*We started about 10 o'clock this morning. Take turns on the line, each going as fast and as far as he can, until he gets pretty tired. Saw a coal seam in a cut rock wall on the bank. Mounted a series of heavy rapids all day. At 7 P.M. hit a cañon and had hard work to get up the rapids, for almost a mile.

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All worn out. Camp 8.30. Jesse plumb fagged out. Everybody wet. We dried our clothes around the fire before we went to bed. Can see how hard this would be for real tenderfeet. Found an old Klondike shack, fallen in, this afternoon, apparently deserted nearly twenty years. Caught some splendid Arctic trout on the fly—the gamest fish we ever saw, and mighty good to eat. They look like sea-trout, although they are a hundred and fifty miles from the sea here. Our camp in a round pocket to-night. The cañon bends sharp to the right. Can see one mountain ahead, but not the big range. John making a map all the time. Stories told us no use this far; things don't check out.

“*Wednesday, July 23d.*—Off at 10.30. Much to our joy, have fine tracking nearly all day. Rapids less powerful, and bends wider, and better beaches to walk on. At 6.30 passed a small creek and explored it. Nowhere near summit yet. We thought we logged twelve miles to-day. Probably haven't averaged half that the other three days. It looks mighty puzzling on ahead. They told us to look out for a sharp, high peak which

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marked the portage. We can't figure it out. They told us to look for a river coming from the right. We don't find one. We seem a long way from the summit. Camp 9.30 on rocky flat. Trout and grayling both for supper. Very fine.

"Thursday, July 24th.—Haven't slept very well. Everybody getting sore and tired. Don't think we went over four or five miles all day to-day. Uncle Dick called it 'unmitigated hell.' Water icy cold now and very fast and heavy. A great many round, smooth stones in the river, so we can hardly walk. Our shoes are worn out, and we are only wearing double moccasins, so that our feet can hardly stand it. Uncle Dick fell down once and hurt his leg pretty bad. An accident might happen any time. The Indian boys are tired but game. When we asked them how far to the top they said, 'I dinno,' which is about all the English they have. Current getting worse and worse, and the bad part is that the water is so shallow that in places it is hard to get even our light canoe through. We have to make crossings, and then there is risk of the boat swinging down and pulling us off our feet. I suppose a fellow

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would drown with the track-line around him. Mighty hard work. At nine o'clock the two Indian boys all in, and had to stop. At ten I went up with Uncle Dick to explore. A river came from the right, so we thought this was the junction of which they told us at McPherson. Went back and got the rest and camped here about midnight. Tundra under the trees. Couldn't drive tent-pegs for ice. A bad camp. Everybody tired.

"Here we found the Summit Tree, not far from the beach. It says: 'Summit Tree. Please register.' Many names under date of 1898. Couldn't read all of them. A grizzly had registered on this tree, too—scraped the bark off high up. Some names we saw were Watt, Goldheim, Marks, Jones, etc. As is the custom, we cut our names in, too, with the date, so that others might see them. We slashed down the brush to the water so that any others coming in now might see this tree easier and so know where they were. If we had not found this tree we would not have been sure we had reached the summit. Well, we are mighty glad, anyhow. Wet and tired, but pretty confident. Not much grub. Some rapids!

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“Friday, July 25th.—So tired we slept late. Everybody stiff. Took the left-hand creek that comes in here, and had a hard pull over a little cataract. This should be called Summit Creek. It doesn't seem to have any name. It runs narrow, and fringed with alders. Very crooked. Saw some jack-snipe and a robin to-day, up here on the summit of the Rockies, almost at the Arctic Sea and above the Arctic Circle!

“We had to drop the line in the brush here and use paddle and pole. Went for an hour and a half and then could see lake on the right. Small creek coming in. Another lake ahead. Everything was blank. It looked like a big country and we had no map. John set down everything as we found it out for ourselves. We climbed the foot-hills to look about. Of course we wanted to find the headwaters of the Bell River, or rather the Little Bell, which runs into the Big Bell, and then into the Porcupine, which runs into the Yukon, but we did not know which gap held the headwaters of the Bell. On the left we saw a chain of little lakes, four or five of them. Supposed there might be channels, so bore to left

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toward these lakes. We're now on a flat country high up, with rock walls far away on either side and mountains on ahead. We are on the tundra now. It is broken up into humps. The French call them '*têtes des femmes*,' or 'woman heads,' because of the long grass that hangs down from the top. Mighty hard to walk over. There is a land portage from Fort McPherson to the summit. A Catholic priest has made it, and he used snow-shoes on these 'woman heads,' although there was no snow. A man could hardly walk in any other way.

"We left two lakes to the right, followed the creek, and came to an old landing. Camped at 6 P.M. to eat. Instead of two lakes up here there are five! We don't know where we are going, but are hanging to our creek. Signs of a portage other side of the lake, so guess we are on the right trail. This is a blind pass. Some danger, I suppose. We are not scared. We all hang together, because any one left here would be helpless.

"*Saturday, July 26th.* — Flies not so bad. Tried out our creek farther and came into third small lake. Cut a portage into next lake. The creek is very

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blind—wanders around through the willows and grass. Jesse and John got away for an hour or two to-day, and were lost; they went to the right where we thought the channel ran, but it didn't go there. Everybody much scared. The last portage is on ahead, six hundred yards from Summit Lake to Loon Lake. Everybody seems to forget these other little lakes, which are confusing. We see signs of old ax-work, so think we must be on the trail. The Hudson's Bay people have used this in the past as well as the Klondike outfits. These latter people must have had an awful time getting over.

"The whole country of the Rat and the country on the summit in this pass may be called altogether new and unknown to any one. We had to find it as much as if no one had ever been there before, except one or two places we saw where men had been. There is no map of it. Now we have made two short portages and one long portage in getting to Loon Lake; and Loon Lake, we are pretty sure, drains into the headwaters of the Bell River.

"This creek is so shallow we have to drag our boat across the tundra. Willy

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had gone on ahead, and says he has found the Bell River. It is not anywhere near where we thought it was. I thought the pass lay far off to the right. Opposite our camp on Loon Lake there is a 'sharp, high peak,' all right, and this no doubt is the one the traders told us about. The trouble is when you say 'sharp, high peak' you may see any one of fifty which you think is the right one, and it may be wrong.

"Found the new creek, which we think is the Little Bell, down a deep bank. Plenty of water and plenty of current. It looks as if it ran back into the mountains fifteen or twenty miles. No one knows anything about it. No one knows anything about this country at all. We call ourselves explorers as much as anybody. I am pretty sure now that this is the right 'sharp, high peak.' There was a trader by name of Charles Camsell came across here, and he made a sort of map. The government maps only guess at this as far as they try to describe it.

"I think it is risky to depend on loose talk of a new country like this. They told us there were only two portages and two lakes, but I have counted eleven lakes and

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ponds on the summit of the Rockies here. We really crossed five lakes, counting in Loon Lake, and we made two short creek portages, one long lake-to-lake portage, and one long lake-to-river portage—the five-hundred-yards drag into the Little Bell. I think this is accurate. John has it all down on his map this way. Many ptarmigan. Plenty of rabbits. The Bell River full of grayling. Never saw the like.

“Our Indian boys left us to-day. They are going back home by themselves. They have a rifle and we have given them a few beans and a little flour and a small piece of bacon—all we can spare. Uncle Dick paid them well. They have helped out very much. Without them I don't know whether we boys could have got the boat up the Rat or not. It was mighty rough, mean work, I can say that. John and Jesse helped all they could, and so did we all. Well, here we are at the summit.

“The Midnight Sun is gone now—there was a sunset to-night. We got to bed about 12 o'clock midnight. Sorry to have the Indian boys go back, as they were cheerful, fine chaps. They say we are all right now, and that this river runs to the Porcupine. I would rather trust

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an Indian than a Klondiker in getting across country.

"We are getting so we don't like rabbits very much. The ptarmigan and grayling still taste good. Our new river is full of grayling, and we have explored it a little bit. It is fine up here in the mountains. John and Jesse and I feel that this is the greatest trip we ever had, or that anybody could have in this country. We feel more alone here than in any place we have ever been in all our lives.

"We now think we can get through."

Rob's journal and John's map later proved most prized possessions of our young explorers, so they were glad they kept them up, although it ever was rather unwelcome work to sit in a cramped-up tent, or out in the air among the mosquitoes, and write or draw for a long time while still tired and wet. Both of them, however, persisted till the end, and later did not regret it.

XIII

DOWN THE PORCUPINE

"I'M awfully tired, Uncle Dick," said Jesse when he sleepily rolled out of his blankets on the following morning. "It was midnight when we went to bed, and I don't feel as though I had slept at all. Besides, it's Sunday."

"Yes," said his uncle, "it's Sunday, July twenty-seventh, according to my notes, and we've been gone from Fort McPherson one week and four days. I think we've made mighty good time this far, for I believe we must be considerably over a hundred miles from Fort McPherson to this place where we stand."

"It's a fine morning for a little rest," suggested Rob. "Maybe it wouldn't be wrong to make a few photographs. I'd like to make a picture of that high peak across from here, which we ought to call Castle Mountain. That's the mountain we've been hunting for the last three or four days."

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"Agreed!" said Uncle Dick. "I think it would be an excellent plan to rest here for a time to-day, and then it would be no harm to start on. Will you let me see the notes of your diary, Rob? We've been relying on you to keep a record of our journey across the mountains, because I've been too busy and, to tell the truth, too worried, to have much time for making notes of the trip."

Rob produced his diary, and Uncle Dick read it page by page. "Fine!" said he. "Fine! This doesn't go into many details, but it will cover the story of our trip as well as I could have done it myself. Now, after we get started down the Bell and the Porcupine, I want you to keep up the same thing, so that we will have some sort of a record of our journey in this wild part of the world."

"I'll have to admit to you boys, now that we are alone, that I don't think we ought to waste any time in here. The two Indian boys who have left us have cut down our supplies considerably, but as they can't possibly get back to McPherson in less than four days, it seemed only fair to share with them what little we had, though it means less for us. We'll have to hurry."

"I'm so sick and tired of rabbits by this time," grumbled John, "that I don't ever

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want to see one again. I don't like to clean them any more, and I don't like to smell them when they are cooking in the kettle."

"You're not the first man in the North to get tired of rabbits," said Uncle Dick. "For a day or two they are all right, but there is really very little strength in the meat. They are, however, the main prop of the fur trade in the North, and the mainstay of the savage population as well. Except for rabbits, all these natives would starve to death in the winter-time. They have almost nothing to eat from one season to the next after the caribou have gone by."

"Where is the caribou migration in here?" asked John.

"It won't pass here at all," replied their leader. "They tell me that the caribou are north of the Porcupine, toward the Arctic, and that they work south along toward the latter part of August. There are a few sheep in here, but mountain-sheep is a hard meat to kill. There is mighty little hope for us to get anything unless we can catch some fish as we go along—and unless we continue to eat rabbits, and maybe some ptarmigan. I shouldn't wonder if the ptarmigan would grow much scantier when we get down out of the mountains farther.

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"Jesse," he continued, "there'll be no harm in your taking your gun and going over to see if you can get us some young geese or some young ducks before we start out, over at the edge of Loon Lake. We've got to have all the food-supplies we can possibly get hold of, because we don't know what is ahead. Hurry up, now, for pretty soon we must call ourselves rested and be on our way. Our canoe is waiting for us, already launched, and it won't take long to get the loads aboard."

Jesse complied with his uncle's instructions, and, taking his light shot-gun, disappeared in the fringe of willows which lay between the camp and the marshy borders of the lake out of which they had made their last portage on the Rocky Mountain summit. It was not long before they began to hear the reports of his gun, and so proficient had he by this time become in its use that when he returned in the course of three-quarters of an hour he had a young goose and a half-dozen mallard ducks to add to the larder.

"Fine!" said Uncle Dick. "Throw them in the boat, son, and we'll be getting ready."

"Rob, go on with your diary; and, John, be sure that you keep up your maps. There isn't a single report of any kind in print or in manuscript, so far as I know, which tells the

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truth about this summit of the Rockies. We are just as much explorers as if we were the first to cross. The Klondikers left no records.

"And now take one last look around you, for I question if you will ever be in a more remote corner of the world in all your lives. This is the most northerly pass of the Rockies. Yonder above us, at the end of what they call the Black Mountain range, lie the last foot-hills between here and the Arctic. Off in that direction the Little Bell finds its head—no man knows where, so far as I can tell. Westward in general lies our course now, and we've got to make five hundred miles between McPherson and the mouth of the Porcupine River, and make it in jig time too, if we want to catch an up-bound boat on the Yukon this fall."

"Well," said Rob, "I suppose if we had to we could play Robinson Crusoe here at least as well as those poor Klondikers did who came to grief here twenty years ago. But as for me, I want to get home on time—not only because we have to go to school and because our parents are waiting for us, but because we set out to make our round trip within certain dates, and we ought to do so if that is a possible thing."

"That's the talk!" said Uncle Dick. "Come

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ahead then, boys. Now we are alone—let us see how we can travel.”

Rob did as requested and made brief notes of their course throughout the remainder of their trip to the Yukon River, which are given here as he wrote them:

“*Sunday, July 27th.*—Beautiful weather. Little Bell very deep, with pools on the bends literally full of grayling. They call them ‘bluefish’ here, and they look purple in the deep, clear water. The Indian boys showed us how to cook them. They split them down the back and skewer them flat, and then hang them up before the fire, flesh side to the fire. They eat them off the skin for a plate. You wouldn’t believe how good they are.

“Rabbits and ptarmigan all along the banks. Sometimes we have to get out to ease the canoe down the rocky rapids, for we must not cut her, since she is the only boat we have, and to be without her would ruin us. Water is icy cold, even colder than the head of the Rat, which was bad enough.

“At 6.30 to-day struck the Big Bell, a deep and clear river. We were all cold, so built a fire. Caught some grayling

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then. Ran till 10 o'clock. Camp on the tundra. Wet and cold, but had plenty of wood near by, so had good fires.

"LaPierre House, an old trading-post, now abandoned, must be not far ahead. That's where the land trail comes in from Fort McPherson, according to the stories. We don't believe anything we hear any more, as all the tales have been unreliable and confusing. Must have made thirty miles to-day before we camped.

"*Monday, July 28th.* — Steady grind down the Bell, which now is crooked and sluggish. At 2.15 in the afternoon found a cabin, but it was not LaPierre House. Found many names on this cabin. Also statement, 'It is ten miles to LaPierre House.' One man here left statement that he was bound for Fairbanks in Alaska. Another man and his wife passed in an earlier year, 'Eleven days out from McPherson in canoes.' This party had four Indian boys, who expected to take nine days to get back to McPherson. This man must have gone on down the Bell River alone.

"Did five hours before lunch, and six after, and still no LaPierre House. Traveled until 10.15 and stopped to cook.

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Rigged a light outrigger for our canoe for night travel, which might be dangerous. We've got to travel day and night, and take turns steering. Don't think we got over three and a half to four miles an hour, it may be three miles only, but think we did thirty-five miles to-day. No game and no fish but a few grayling in the morning. We feel a little bit glum. We can't tell where we are. Rigged a short sail, and it helped us a little bit. Mosquitoes not quite so bad. Making slower time than we hoped.

"Tuesday, July 29th.—Tried to sleep in boat, and didn't do very well. I steered part of the night, and Uncle Dick part of the time. At 7 A.M. made LaPierre House. It is eighty miles from the summit at least, and that is fully twice as far as we were told that it was! Some said it was only thirty miles beyond the summit. Saw signs where raft had been built—maybe some Indians coming downstream for their winter quarters. Heard a man started across McPherson to LaPierre House on the land trail with two dogs. Too much plunder, and he nearly died. Don't know where he is now. Rain and cold all day.

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"Ate at midnight. We take turns paddling the best we can, but John and Jesse get pretty tired. We let them sleep more. Weather dismal and cold. It is hard for two to sleep in our canoe and two to run it at night. Have been wet and cold a good deal.

"*Wednesday, July 30th.*—Breakfast in rain. Built a big fire. We slept a little where we could be warm. Off at 12.50. Found a big river coming in from the left, and knew that it must be the Porcupine. Struck it about 2 o'clock. A big wind coming up-stream. At first we thought the Porcupine was running to the left. Of course it had to run to the right. Found the wind hard to buck with the canoe, so that we stood still sometimes. At 6.30 went ashore, built a log fire, and dried our clothes and beds. Everything very wet. John and Jesse very tired and shivering. Both seem pretty near exhausted. Wind becoming more gusty. Fixed our canoe, which was leaking a little. We don't know just how far it is from here to the Porcupine. Jesse killed a beaver. We boiled the tail and ate it, and it was good. Pushed on a little farther in the dark.

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“Thursday, July 31st. — Summer is going awfully fast. Ran in for breakfast on a stony ledge. Think we are only going about two miles an hour. After breakfast tried to sail, and think we ran ten or twelve miles easier. Had to paddle then. The reaches of this river are long and the current is slow. The man who calls the Porcupine and the Bell ‘rapid mountain streams’ doesn’t know what he is talking about, for neither is rapid. Passed the mouth of the Eagle River early in the day. Landed late at the mouth of the Driftwood River, as it is marked on the government map. Found an Indian here with one canoe. He has his wife and two children and seven dogs here. One strange dog has come into his camp. It howls a great deal and is lost. We don’t know whose it is or where it came from.

“These Indians are starving, and, little as we have, we have to give them something. They wanted some flour and fat, and we shared almost our last. They have nets set and are waiting for the salmon to run. The Indian has only caught one salmon, and he said if they did not come pretty soon his people would die. They conclude to go on farther down the

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stream with us. He says he can take everything he has in that little canoe. They are wonders with boats.

"We all hustle now, because starvation threatens every one in our party. Even rabbits are scarce. No ptarmigan, no ducks, no fish. The river is big and the wind affects the down-stream speed.

"The Indian keeps along with us. His canoe has about an inch and a half free-board, and is loaded down with children, dogs, nets, and so forth. Glad to have the Indian with us, because he knows something of the country. He says Fish River, the next stream below, is half-way to Old Crow. This is an old trading-post which gets supplies from the Yukon, and we will feel safe if we can get there.

"Our new Indian is named Andrew. He can talk a little. He says the land portage from Fort McPherson to Fort LaPierre is lined with cast-off stuff that people have tried to carry and couldn't. It is a starving country and a starving march. So is this a starving journey by water. When we went ashore it was in a rousing gale of wind. Uncle Dick baked some bannocks in our old way, leaning the frying-pan against a stick driven

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down before the fire. We are so tired that when we don't have to work we just fall asleep wherever we are. We always have some one awake to watch things and to tell the others when to wake up. We have been wet a great deal of the time from rain and waves. Dried our bedding this time, once more. Not much excitement and plenty of hard work. I don't know whether any of us would come across here again or not. Probably not.

"After a long wait the wind let up, and we started in the late evening for the run to Old Crow, which we are anxious to see. Head winds. Hard paddling. Kept on into the night, but met an awful storm. Wind was almost a tornado, and for a wonder snow fell in sheets. Our canoe got turned around two or three times in the night, and we wouldn't know which way to go, for the wind came upstream and every other way. We nearly swamped. Managed to get ashore, drenched to the skin and very cold. It looks like winter. Andrew's children are crying a great deal now. We haven't much to eat. It was about the worst night we ever had. We pushed on down

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as fast as we could as soon as we got warm enough to work. Reached Old Crow trading-post 8 A.M., after the worst night I ever spent.

"Saturday, August 2d. — What luck! Old Crow post is deserted—no one here at all—not even a native hanging around! Uncle Dick thought it was right to break open a window and go in. There was a stove, so we made a fire. The trader had left his stock here. Of course it was burglary to open the store. If an Indian did it they probably would follow him a thousand miles and punish him. We left a note telling them who we were and what we had taken—another blanket or so, some pairs of mittens, and a little clothing for the Indian children, who were almost frozen. The trader lives at Fort Yukon, and we will pay him there.

"Andrew says the next stop is going to be at Rampart House, sixty miles down the river. We have taken about fourteen hours to make the last thirty-five miles, as near as we can tell. We are all in bad shape. Getting a little weak.

"The trader's goods have been damaged by water. This wet snow fell more than a foot deep over everything, and the

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roof has leaked. Well, we can't stay here long, and we'll have to travel day and night the best we can. Any accident now would be very bad for everybody.

"John and Jesse paddle all they can. We all get very cold, as it seems almost like winter. Stopped to get warm and eat. Uncle Dick says plenty of tea won't hurt us if we work. We take turns fair as we know how, the ones paddling who can stay awake.

"Well, we are nearer to being safe. By traveling all the time, fifteen and a half hours from Old Crow, we made Rampart House—not bad time if the distance is correct. Weather cold. Snow threatening again.

"*Sunday, August 3d.* — At Rampart House. One week from the summit. Two weeks from the mouth of the Rat. Rampart House looks mighty good to us all. Here there is a Hudson's Bay post with some goods in stock and a young Englishman running it. Natives almost starving. No fish yet. The men are just starting out for caribou, which are now reported thirty miles north of here. Not much goods left in the trading-post. Our reception here very chilly. No one

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seems to care whether we live or not, and sometimes we have been so tired we hardly did ourselves.

"The trader tells us it is 240 miles from here to the Yukon, and it seems a long way. At least we can get warm and dry here.

"Next day. We slept eighteen hours out of twenty-four. Weather warming up. Hunters not back, but one Indian caught a king salmon in a net, so the village is more cheerful. Everybody shared the salmon, which was a large one, fifty pounds. These people are Loucheux. Sometimes squaw-men live in here at Rampart House. More dogs here than I ever saw. One ate my moccasins last night—the ones that I had extra soles on. I wish he hadn't done it, because I needed them.

"This is an important post in the North. It is old and well known, and it has special interest because it is directly on the International Boundary-line. There is a monument here which the American surveyors put up not long ago. They were in here quite a while, but their work of marking out the International Boundary between Alaska and the Dominion of Canada is now done.



HUSKY DOG—RAMPART HOUSE

1864
 5/10/1864

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"All of us boys got gay and went over on the other side of the Boundary and took off our hats and gave three cheers for America. We were glad we were on American soil once more. We feel now as if we were getting out of the fur-trading country. Am not sorry. I don't like the country or the people in it very much. Everything seems so shiftless. Still, they manage to get on. I suppose if I lived up here a hundred years things might look different.

"*Monday, August 4th.* — Breakfast 10.30. We've got some supplies here. Nothing much to boast of. Fixed up our boat again for the long run for home. We feel pretty safe now. Left Andrew at Old Crow, but saw some people at Rampart who knew about him and other travelers who are back of us on the Porcupine. We hope they will all get out. Winter will come any time now. Left at 4.30 in the afternoon. Ran two hours and had tea. River rising very fast, and current swift, so that we thought we made five or six miles an hour at least. Ran two and a half hours, some of us paddling, and thought we made thirty miles. We are trying to use this rise in the river all

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we can. Camped on a stony beach. Sand is very wet and cold for a bed, but we cut some willows and did fairly well. Not very cold.

"Tuesday, August 5th.—Struck an Indian camp and traded tea for some fresh moose meat, which we were mighty glad to get. I am like John—I never want to see a rabbit again.

"To-day passed a boat tracking up-stream for Rampart. A man and dog were pulling. They had a sail set to help, and the steersman was poling and paddling the best he could to help. Even so, it was a slow way to get up-stream. We felt sorry for them when we left them. Later in the day met still another boat, two Indians tracking freight up to Rampart House. They say sometimes freight is carried up this river with a power-boat. These Indians say we've come about a hundred miles from Rampart, and that in about twenty miles we will be half-way to the mouth of the river. Wish it were not so far.

"Wednesday, August 6th.—This is hard work. We rested and paddled and slept and paddled. Too much wind, and we had to quit toward evening. When the

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wind lulled we started again. Much rain and dark weather. Water very fast, probably six to seven miles an hour. We eat at least four times a day, so as to keep strong as possible. Considerable wind now, and fall seems coming. Whenever the sun comes out and we can lie down in the sun, we do, so as to keep warm while we sleep. Don't know how far it is to Yukon, but have been making good time.

"Thursday, August 7th.—Head winds again, but sun bright and warm. Spent considerable time ashore, resting, as we were about played out, and we thought that we might now be safe in a little delay. Got off late in the afternoon, and did well. Uncle Dick says the Yukon can't be more than fifty to seventy-five miles ahead. Camped late in a bunch of spruce, and slept until 2 o'clock in the morning. When we began to run we saw signs of a salmon fishery such as we have in Alaska. There is a man here named Martin, and his squaw and children all camped on the beach. He says it is only thirty-five miles to the Yukon, and that we can do it in six or seven hours. Hurrah!

"Friday, August 8th. — We can still

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paddle, but are not very strong, any of us. Uncle Dick is cheerful. He never has been out of sorts. We boys have been pretty tired, and sometimes Jesse has felt almost like crying, he was so played out; but we have all done the best we could to keep a stiff upper lip. Hope Uncle Dick will think we have done all right. Just the same, we are glad we are coming out of the worst of this trip. It has been worse than we thought.

“Passed two Indian camps in late evening. Then they said we were within three hours of Yukon. Entered the mouth of a white-stained slough which meant different waters from those of the Porcupine. We feel that we are now in the Yukon country—and that’s *our* country, because the Yukon and Alaska are one!

“Ten P.M. Hurrah! Hurrah! At Fort Yukon! Here is the American flag flying from the Anglican mission-house! We are crazy with joy, all of us boys, and Uncle Dick smiles all the time. We are safe now, because they say there’ll be several boats up-stream yet this fall. Uncle Dick says there’ll be no more danger, and he now begins to tell us that we have been through worse dangers

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than maybe we thought of. I suppose it was a pretty rough journey. Certainly we all got awfully tired. We are thin as snakes, all four of us.

"There is an Indian village below here, and a government school for Indian boys, besides the Anglican mission-house and church. It certainly does seem more civilized. This is our own country.

"And this is the Yukon that runs between the banks here — our own old Yukon! I love it better than the Mackenzie. For a while at least we will be under our flag, and not any other. All tired. Next we'd better go to bed. However, made camp near a roadhouse, almost a mile from the Indian village. Some whites live here who seem tough and noisy. Some liquor here with them, for they seem to be shouting and singing.

"Although we have been on American soil or American water since we left Rampart House on the Porcupine, this seems to us like the first time we have really been in our own country. Good night! Wish we were all home at Valdez with our people."

XIV

AT FORT YUKON

IT was a ragged and dirty party of travelers, to be sure, who lay in the litter of the dooryard of the road-house, wrapped in their blankets, and sleeping late in spite of the warm morning sun which shone into their faces. They were exhausted by the long, trying, and hard work of their dangerous journey, and, once they felt safe, had fallen into the half-stupor which follows such fatigue. Therefore they did not at first know of the presence of the dignified and well-dressed man who stood hanging over the gate of the road-house, looking at the sleepers as they lay in the yard, rolled up in their blankets. Uncle Dick, always alert, was first awake, and sat up in his blankets.

“Good morning, sir,” said he to the stranger.

“Good morning, sir,” replied the other, in turn. “Excuse me, but I’ve been asked to look for the party of Mr. Richard McIntyre,

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himself and three young boys, who are reported to be lost somewhere between here and the mouth of the Mackenzie River. The relatives have sent in word by cable, and naturally it has come into my hands."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Uncle Dick, sitting still, half-clad in his blankets, "but, although you may not suppose it, I am Mr. McIntyre, and these are the young men referred to, no doubt. You have word from outside?"

"From Mrs. Vernon Wilcox, of Valdez, and from Mrs. Henry D. Hardy, of the same city; I have the message here. It came down from Circle City on the last boat."

"And you, sir? I beg your pardon—"

"I am the archdeacon of the Anglican Church in this district," replied the other, "and my name is Hudson. I have come this morning to ask you to our house to live during your stay here. There will be no boat out for some days as yet." Still he looked half-doubtfully at the man whom he addressed, as though possibly he might be some impostor, so strange did he appear, unshaven, with long hair, and in garments which barely clung together.

Uncle Dick laughed at this, and explained that he did not blame any one for suspecting

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himself and his party of anything in the world. Then he called to his young companions, and the archdeacon himself smiled when he saw the four standing, the fresher for the pails of water which they threw over one another, in the front yard.

"I am a traveler myself," said he, "and have mushed dogs many thousand miles in this northern country. So I know what hard travel is, winter and summer. Come with me, if you please."

So they accompanied him to his home, the only civilized place, as Uncle Dick was disposed to say, in all the settlement thereabouts. Here the boys of the party had the best meal they had known for many a day, with real meat and gravy and actual bread and butter, such as they had been used to at home. Although, of course, they displayed no curiosity in their host's house, they were well pleased enough, as they later saw signs of comfort and good taste all about them.

"Now," said the archdeacon, after they had breakfasted, "I know how you feel about your clothes. Happily, I have some such clothing provided for our own needs here. Although the things will not be in the latest fashion, perhaps we can fix you up better than you now are."

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"As for you," he said to Uncle Dick, "you are welcome to a suit of my own clothing if it will serve you. We are not dissimilar in build, I believe. Come with me and let us see what we can do for you."

In half an hour the four emerged from another room in the house, each with a complete new outfit, and to each of them it seemed, in the circumstances, that they were especially well dressed.

"Well," said Uncle Dick, "you certainly are Good Samaritans in your church here in the North. I shall not offend you by offering pay for what you have done for us, but we have some boats here, with a canoe and a few odds and ends of that sort, which we shall be most happy to leave with you when we go out."

"I thank you very much for that," said the reverend gentleman. "All such things are very useful to us indeed. And I shall be glad to have them, provided that you are quite finished with their use."

"And now will you tell me of your trip?" he resumed. "It was over the old Klondike trail of twenty years ago—a dangerous trip for you to take with just boys like these."

"Well, you see," said Uncle Dick, with a look of pride on his face, "these are not just ordinary boys. They are an Alaskan product,

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'young Alaskans,' all three of them, and more used to out of doors than are most young folk of their age. They are good travelers already, better than many a man; they have made the Peace River and the Saskatchewan, have run the Big Rapids of the Columbia, and have killed their Kadiak bear in southwest Alaska. I knew what they were or I never would have taken on this trip in their company. I fancy"—and he smiled—"that they did better than many a tenderfoot who came over the Rat Portage twenty years ago."

"No doubt, no doubt!" replied the arch-deacon. "I join you in your pride that you are all Americans, like myself. I, too, am something of an explorer, as I may say modestly. I am just back from the climbing of Denali, and I had a boy with me in that ascent—an Indian boy he was!"

"Denali!" exclaimed Uncle Dick, excitedly. "You mean Mount McKinley—I know the Indian name."

The older man nodded with gravity. "Yes," said he. "We climbed it for the first time—the first scientific time. Of course you know about the false claims that have been made?"

Uncle Dick rose and grasped him by the hand warmly. "Sir," said he, "you are a great man, even had you never lived so long

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and useful a life here in your work. I am glad that the Church and not the traders put the first flag on top of the highest mountain on this continent. I congratulate you, and I am proud that my young friends can meet you here."

"It was not so difficult," said the reverend gentleman, modestly, once more. "Only, be sure, it actually was done. Be sure also that it was a boy—an Indian boy—who first set foot upon the top of Mount Denali. I held back when we got to the very summit, thinking it appropriate that a native of the people who owned this land before we came should be the first to set foot upon its highest summit."

"Fine!" said Uncle Dick. "That's what I call sportsmanship, and I want you boys to remember it. That's something different from what Admiral Peary did when he found the North Pole. We are well met here, Archdeacon, if you will allow me to say so, and if you will accept us I may say that we all are sportsmen, and sportsmen are always well met."

He motioned to his young companions, and each of them in turn came up and shook hands with this explorer of the Far North, who greeted them with gravity and kindness.

"Well," said he, at length, smiling, "here

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is our little wretched town, as bad, perhaps, as any white and Indian settlement in Alaska. I have spent many years among these people, and I presume I am disliked as much as any man along the Yukon! As you see, we stand for law and order here, and we churchmen are hated here for that reason. We arrest some of the lawbreakers and take them down to Ruby to the courts, and have them fined or imprisoned. They threaten us—but none the less you see we have not run away.

“You will come to our services to-morrow?” he added. “Yonder is our little log church. Perhaps our services will prove interesting for a special reason. I speak in our tongue, but what I say must be interpreted to my Indian audience.”

“Certainly; we’ll be glad,” said Uncle Dick. “We feel as though we had somewhat lapsed these last few weeks. It is fine to be with you here and in these surroundings.”

“I see that your young friends carry books in their pockets, and papers,” rejoined the archdeacon, nodding to Rob and John.

“Oh, that’s nothing, sir,” said Rob. “We just make notes of things as we go along, you see. John here is our map-maker. He always makes maps of the countries which we visit. So you see—”

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"And did you make a map of the summit of the Rockies — the old Rat Portage of the traders, young man?"

"Why, yes, sir," said John. "I put it all down here as we went along, and Uncle Dick says it's pretty good. He's an engineer."

He now spread out his map upon the table, as their host suggested.

"I'll tell you why I asked," said the latter. "As I have said, I have been obliged to be an explorer and a traveler myself—my field is very large. It is nothing for me to travel a hundred miles behind a dog-sled in the winter-time to hold services or to make a baptism or a wedding. Sometime I hope to make that very journey that you have made. At Dawson I have seen some maps, or alleged maps, but no two are alike."

"That's what Uncle Dick told us and what we have found out," said Rob. "We couldn't get any idea of that country at all, and had to find it out for ourselves."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, sir," said John. "When I get back home and into Uncle Dick's engineering office I'll make you a tracing of my map, and you can have it for your very own. I shall be very glad to do that."

"And if you will I shall be very much in

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your debt, my young friend," said the arch-deacon. "That will be fine, and I shall value it. I fancy that many a Klondiker who was cast away in the winter-time in that wild country would have been glad to have had such assistance as this. But not even Harper or McQueston or any of the other early explorers on the Peace and the Liard and the Mackenzie and the Peel and the Rat and all these rivers running into the Yukon which have been so famous for their gold—not one of these men, I will say, could ever make an exact map of the country he had crossed. As for the traders—well, you know that yourself. They don't want new-comers, and they don't help them any too much." He sighed, spreading out his hands with but partial resignation.

"It is a hard fight which the Church wages with the fur trade in the North. We are antagonistic, although we live side by side, both Anglican and Catholic missions, almost in the dooryard of the Hudson's Bay Company and Revillons and all the smaller fry of independents which are pushing in now. But we do our best.

"Now, then, young sir," he resumed, turning to Rob, "I have no doubt that your notes are as good as this young man's map. I hope

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you will keep up your diary just as I have done in much of my exploration work in Alaska and the Northwest Territory. These things are invaluable in later life."

Rob thanked his host very much, and promised to do as he advised. Therefore, what he found of interest at this, the first considerable American settlement they met on the Yukon, should prove worth setting down in his own words.

XV

THE FUR TRADE

THE memoranda which the historian of the party set down regarding Fort Yukon had more or less to do with the scenes and incidents connected with the fur trade which had come under his observation. But before coming to these Rob put down a few things regarding the nature of this American settlement on the great river of Alaska:

“Saturday, August 9th.—We had forks and napkins at the archdeacon’s house. Went out to see the town. Indian tents scattered over three-fourths of a mile. Three stores, a post-office, a church, and a road-house. Found the owners of the store at Old Crow which we burglarized, and paid them for what we got. They said it was all right. Seems as though there are hundreds of dogs here. Boat expected up the Yukon almost any day—

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there is no regular time for their landing here.

"*Sunday, August 10th.*—Went to church in the log church. The archdeacon preached. A full-blood by the name of David interpreted. Another native read the liturgy, but not very well. The sermon was simple and plain. He touched the natives' pride. Told them how they used to get along with bows and arrows and stone axes, how they conquered the wilderness; told them not to forget those virtues and not to give way to the vices of white people. Many strange faces in the audience. Saw one like a Japanese samurai, with bristling beard and stiff black hair. Have seen this type everywhere these last 1,500 miles—people who look like Japs. I don't think much law and order here. White men married to Indian women. There is a government school and a good many Indian children go there. The men get too much whisky here.

"The archdeacon is a great traveler. He told me why people up north like bright-colored clothes. He says that the hind sack on his sled is brilliantly embroidered, and when he is mushing dogs

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he finds himself looking at this bright piece of color. All the landscape is very monotonous, and the night is hard to endure so long. He says that is why the natives like bright colors.

"This afternoon in the archdeacon's house I found a strange old book. It seems to have been written by some preacher some hundreds of years ago. His name was Bartolomeo de Las Casas. He must have been a Spaniard, for he is writing about the Indians. He says, 'We are killing them, and have done so relentlessly.' Seems to me that was a good deal like the fur trade. He goes on and says some more from Ecclesiastes: 'The Most High is not pleased with the offerings of the wicked. Neither is He pacified for sin by the multitude of sacrifices. Whoso bringeth an offering of the goods of the poor doth as one that killeth the son before the father's eyes.'

"Well, that sounds as though some one were writing at the big fur monopolies and the way they handle the Indians. Las Casas says that his Church thought they owned all the middle part of this continent. The Hudson's Bay Company started in to own all the northern part

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of it. I can't see the difference. Las Casas says the discovery and conquest of the American dominions has wrought ruin to Spain as a nation. The results were 'disastrous to her power.' I am only a boy, and don't know much about things, but I know perfectly well the fur trade is based on injustice. I consider it the most ignoble form of business in the world. I think it is pulling down the Indians—as the archdeacon said in his sermon, they were more manly and self-respecting before the traders came. If the government of Canada claims to be so good, it might look into the injustice done to the native people by some of the traders, both the old companies and the independents. I have read somewhere, 'No right is or can be founded on injustice.' So what rights have they got?

"The Spaniards were after gold, and these big companies are after fur. They have both relied on keeping the natives down. That's why they are so jealous of outsiders getting any knowledge about their ways.

"I have heard that an Indian always pays his debts to the trader. On this trip I heard a man say that the big com-

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panies never forgive an Indian a debt in all his life. He would not dare to let his debt run if he could pay it, because if he did he would starve.

"I wonder if old Mr. Las Casas was any relation to the archdeacon here. They both preach a good deal alike, it seems to me. He says, 'The system of oppression and cruelty in dealing with the natives makes them curse the name of God and our holy religion. . . . For should God decree the destruction of Spain it may be seen it is because of our destruction of the Indians, and that His justice may be made apparent.'

"Well, I guess that will be all I will write out of the book. I was just thinking that what the Spaniards did in getting gold was something like what the white men are doing to-day in getting fur in this northern country. It never did look good to me.

"But though the Indians don't always remember everything they hear in church, I believe the Church is honester, whether it is the English Church or the Catholic, or any of them, because they haven't anything to get out of it, so far as I can see, and the traders have. I don't think I shall very much enjoy seeing fine furs worn by ladies in my own country after

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this—I know where they come from and what they cost. I wonder what Las Casas would say if he were here.

“A good many Scotchmen are through this northern country, and some Scandinavians. I read in a book by Mr. Stewart that you could tell the Scotchman even in a half-breed because he always says ‘boy’ and ‘whatever’ the way the Highlanders do—no matter how old you are a Highlander always calls you ‘boy.’ He says the Bishop of Saskatchewan had a half-breed boy working for him who always called him ‘Boy my Lord.’ That seems odd to me! And then about their saying ‘whatever’—a Scotch half-breed said, ‘We use it because we could not express ourselves without it whatever.’ And then he said, ‘Is it not correct whatever?’ And after a while he said he could see no objection to that word whatever. A Highlander always says ‘whatever,’ and you can’t keep him from it. I noticed that in some of the posts we came through.

“A woman here was sixty years old, and she married a carpenter, and he took her money and started a sawmill. They haven’t got any sawmill now.

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"A good many people here talk about other people. I have noticed that in almost any small place, but I think it is worse up here in the North. I suppose they get lonesome and have to talk.

"Another thing is, they drink so much up in this country whenever they get a chance. They don't keep their gallon of Scotch whisky, which is supposed to last them a year, but sit down and drink it up in two days. So they get out of whisky and some people get crazy for it. In this same book by Mr. Stewart he tells about some men at one of the trading-posts of the Mackenzie who didn't have any liquor, but the summer before there had been a party of scientists there who had left some insects, bugs, and snakes and things, done up in alcohol. Some other traders visited this agent, and he was sorry not to have anything to give them to drink. So he thought he would pour off this alcohol from the bugs and things. Still, he thought it might be poison, so he tried it on a half-breed dog-driver. It did not kill him, so he served it to his friends, and said nothing about it, and they all thought it was very good! I believe this is a true story, be-

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cause so many things happen up in this country that we don't hear about at home.

"*Monday, August 11th.*—This is on the steamship *Schwatka*, and we are bound up the Yukon! We said good-by early this morning to the good archdeacon. It was dark when he heard the dogs howling, and knew a boat was coming, so he called us and we hurried and got dressed, and just got on this boat in time. She isn't towing any barge, so ought to make good time up to Dawson. We were sorry to leave the archdeacon, but we are glad to be on our way home.

"We get four meals a day on the *Schwatka*, and very good ones. John is happy! We think we will all put on a little flesh before we get home. Uncle Dick is writing and going over his notes. John is making his map. Jesse is reading. So I write.

"*Tuesday, August 12th.* — At 1.30 in the morning we made Circle City, which, as everybody knows, is right on the Arctic Circle, or was supposed to be. This was the first time Uncle Dick could get out any word. He sent out a message by wireless which will be relayed to Skagway and cabled to Valdez. He said in

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about ten days we would be at Skagway. Our folks will be mighty glad to hear from us—and how glad we'll be to get home! We are still inside the limit of the time schedule which Uncle Dick set for us. Now we think we are safe to finish the journey inside our schedule. Pretty good, we all think.

"Wednesday, August 13th. — At 8.30 this morning got to Eagle, which is an old Alaska settlement and was once an army post. There is an Anglican mission here. The scenery around here is far beyond anything that was on the Mackenzie River. We all like the Yukon better than the Mackenzie. Some Church people going out on the boat from here.

"I don't know how the Klondikers got up the Yukon after they had come over the Rat Portage; but Dawson is three days above Fort Yukon by steamboat. If they tracked or poled or rowed up I bet it took them a good deal more than three days.

"Uncle Dick has asked me to set down everything I see at Dawson, which is the big gold-camp that caused the Klondike stampede in 1897; so I think I will do that the best I can."

XVI

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ROB'S diary went on as he had promised, for during the time that they lay between boats at the once famous gold-camp there was abundant opportunity for them to get about and see pretty much everything there was worth seeing. Rob's record runs day by day as previously:

"*Thursday, August 14th.*—Dawson at 4 A.M. Our boat does not go any farther. We reserved passage on the *Norcom* for White Pass. She will sail the evening of next Saturday. On British soil again.

"This place has had twenty or thirty thousand inhabitants in boom times, but there are only about twelve hundred people here now, I believe. A good many people are starting off for Chisana district, up the White River, where they say there is a gold strike. All this country

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has been crazy over gold strikes for a good deal more than twenty years.

"We went to a hotel here and got baths and got barbered up, which makes a change in our looks. We got a few things to wear which the archdeacon could not give us.

"*Friday, August 15th.*—Went up the famous Klondike River, which comes in here. Half of it is clean and the other half dirty. Saw no more pick-and-shovel work. Everything is run by the big dredges owned by companies, which do the work of hundreds of men. They thaw out the ground now with steam-pipes which they drive down in, and then turn in steam. Then they rip out the ground down twenty feet with the big scoops of the dredges. They just have water enough to float the dredges. Everything is worked and washed right on the dredge. It beats placer mining a whole lot. But a few men can work one of these dredges, and then a few men get all the money they turn out.

"Walked on up to Bonanza and some of the famous creeks above the dredges. They are using hydraulic mining up there, another wholesale way. Saw no individual mining.

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"We boys ate supper with a lot of French people who are working 'lays' on some claims which are owned by other people on the hillsides up toward Bonanza. The bed-rock, where the rich gold is, is about the middle of the hill, and runs straight through, and they are following through right along the bed-rock three hundred feet below the surface. They have 'drifted' in here, and they are using hydraulic mining, too. They seemed a jolly lot. They have a woman cooking for their crew, and asked us to eat with them—the best they had. We could not talk much in their language, and they did not understand very much of ours.

"We walked down from the mountains, four and a half miles, in an hour and five minutes, and were not tired.

"*Saturday, August 16th.* — The Commissioner of Yukon Territory—who is about the same as a governor would be in a Territory of the United States—asked us to luncheon to-day, because he knew of Uncle Dick. So we all went and had a very pleasant time. This is the Government House, and it has the British flag over it, of course. Every-

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body was very nice to us, and other ladies and gentlemen asked us a lot of questions, and we did of them, too. We felt very much at home here, and friendly. The Governor, or Commissioner, used to be American himself. He came up here in the early gold days.

"One gentleman at the luncheon told a good many stories of the old times. He told how cold it got sometimes. He said once they made some candles out of condensed milk. They sold them to a saloon-keeper, for a joke, because every one wants candles in the winter-time, but the saloon-keeper could not light these candles at all! He said there used to be a young man in Dawson they called 'The Evaporated Kid' because he was so thin. He said, too, there was a runaway express agent who had absconded from somewhere in America, and when he got to Dawson he hadn't anything except one painting, a copy of a celebrated picture in Europe. He sold it for a half-interest in a claim, which proved to be worth \$60,000. He went back to the States and gave himself up, and got a month in jail after he had paid what he had stolen. Then he came back to Alaska and has made a good

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citizen! He has always kept the old man who sold the interest in this claim. Of course they wouldn't tell us the name of this man.

"They say the best place for hunting big game is to go up the Pelly River and then up the MacMillan River. White Horse is a good place to start from. There are sheep up in there, of two kinds, and moose and grizzly bear and caribou. September is the best time to go in there, but it would take about a month, and a fellow would have to be careful not to get caught in the snow. The Mount McKinley country is even better as a big-game place, so they tell me. I wish we boys could go in there some time.

"They used to get all kinds of money in here in the early days. This same gentleman told me he once had an interest in a claim where they took out \$430,000 on a fraction of a claim which was only eighty feet by four hundred. He says the dredge people have found that they can work much poorer dirt than eight dollars a yard, which would pay a shovel-man. One man can only rock about two and a half yards a day. He can sluice about twice that. A dredge, working four men, works from

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2,400 to 3,000 tons a day. So you see why dredges are in here now. He said nearly all the men who got rich easy lost their money. There was a lucky Swede who married an extravagant woman, and she spent all his money—several hundred thousand dollars—right away; but he only laughed and said, 'I'll strike it again pretty soon.' But he never has. He says there were a good many hundreds of men who held on to their stakes and went out with 50,000 to 100,000 dollars each. It must have been exciting times in this little old town! Very quiet now.

"All the pictures of Dawson show the big white scar on a mountain-side where a landslip took off the whole side of the mountain many years ago. The Indians say it buried a village at its foot. This big hole in the mountain is right where you can see it down the street. You can't help seeing it if you go to Dawson.

"I was much interested about the first man who discovered this country. They don't all tell the same story about it. The Yukon Territory and Alaska are so much alike, and the people settling them have been so much alike, that it seems they are about the same. We crossed the interna-

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tional boundary between them away back at Rampart House. From there to here, on both sides of that line, men have been coming into this country, no one knows how long.

"Jack McQueston, so Mr. Ogilvie says in his book about the Yukon country, established Fort Reliance, six miles below where Dawson is, in 1871. Then Arthur Harper came in and joined him in trading. One time some Indians got hold of their rat poison, and two old women and one girl died. That made the Indians sore, so the traders had to pay for the women. They said the two old women were no good, but they would pay ten skins for the young woman, about six dollars. The Indians said that was all right! It's a funny country.

"After that a man by the name of Mayo came in with Harper and McQueston, and in 1886, so this book says, they went down to Forty-Mile River, where they found gold already discovered. It was McQueston that founded Circle City, but it is not really on the line—nearly a degree in latitude south of it.

"Harper and McQueston seemed to move all around everywhere. They said

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they found color on the Peace River and on the Liard, but did not find anything on the Mackenzie. But on the Peel River they found good prospects, and some on the Porcupine also. They were all over that country, where we've been.

"This Harper party came over the Rat Portage, too, the way we did, and they describe it about the way we would. But that was long before the Klondike rush, for they got to Fort Yukon on July 15, 1873. The Klondike was not known then, nor until more than twenty years later.

"I guess that the man who really ought to have the credit for finding the gold in the Klondike country was Bob Henderson. He was not trading so much as prospecting. Besides, he got his start about the way most prospectors do—an Indian showed him some pieces of gold, and showed him the place where he found them. Anyhow, that is how Harper found some gold in the Tanana country. But Harper, though he was around in this country twenty-four years, never found any big strike. He died in Arizona in 1897. Jack McQueston stayed in later, and everybody remembered him as a generous trader.

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“They say that the first gold to come out of the Yukon came from the Tanana River in 1880. A Mr. Holt of the Alaska Commercial Company took the first party over the Dyea Pass and down the Yukon, in 1875. They say a very little gold came out in 1882 and 1883, but nobody had ever heard of the Klondike then.

“McQueston liked the Stewart River better than any place for a long while. They got gold in a great many streams running into the Yukon, and found it on nine creeks as early as 1894. They sent out about \$400,000 that year. There were a good many miners all along the river even in 1894—seventy-five miners in one party of stampedeers. But still no one had heard of the Klondike, although they had prospected between the Yukon and the Arctic Ocean and far down to the mouth of the Yukon, and about everywhere else!

“Harper and McQueston had been on the Klondike, but did not find anything at first. Bob Henderson had as much nerve as anybody. They went up on Indian River, which runs parallel to the Klondike, about fifteen miles away. Henderson worked on Quartz Creek, they say,

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and he had to thaw out his ground with log fires the way they used to do, so he did not make much. Then he worked on Australia Creek. Of course these men all moved around a good deal. He only got about 600 or 700 dollars on the creek where he was working, so he moved over to a stream which he thought ran into the Klondike, and he called this Gold Bottom. He got the color here.

"Bob Henderson met George W. Carmac, and he offered to share his new strikes up on Gold Bottom, but he drew the line at the Indians Carmac was living with! So Carmac did not go out at first. But Carmac and two Indians, Charley and George, did go up the Klondike, and up Bonanza after a little, about a mile above the mouth. They were looking after logs for lumber. But they found color up in there. The Indians didn't care much about it. But after Bob told them about strikes higher up in the country, these Indians and Carmac went farther up Bonanza. They all claim to have found the first gold there. Henderson would not let them stake on Gold Bottom because he didn't like the Indians, so they turned back, because they had found ten

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cents to the pan on Bonanza. They found more gold on Bonanza, and so Carmac staked there on August 17, 1896, the Discovery claim and Number One Below Discovery, each 500 feet long, up and down the creek. They tell me that these claims ran the full width of the valley bottom — that is, from base to base of the hill on either side.

“Then some Indians staked above and below, Tagish Charley on Number Two below, and Skookum Jim on Number One above. They had about a cartridgeful of gold when they got down to the mouth of the Klondike, and they still thought there was more money in lumber than in mining.

“Everybody got wind of it now, and there were a lot of people in this country already, before the Klondike news got out. There were twenty-five men looking for Henderson’s Creek, and about that many looking for the Carmac claims.

“So Henderson didn’t get any of the rich strike on Bonanza, although he had told Carmac about it. He always said Carmac ought to have told him, so he could have got in there, too. Henderson

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couldn't get out to Forty-Mile in time to record his claim on Gold Bottom, until Andrew Hunker got in on the creek below him, and he recorded his Discovery claim and had the creek named after him—Hunker Creek. But Henderson had cut a blaze on a tree and marked this creek as Gold Bottom Creek long before that.

“So they gave a discovery claim to Carmac on Bonanza Creek, and another on Gold Bottom or Hunker Creek to this man Hunker. So Henderson, who had been in here two years, and who had told everybody about what he had found and wanted everybody to share in it, got only a very bad claim, after all. Hard luck.

“I wish I could talk with those old-timers and the Indians who were first in this gold country; but Mr. Ogilvie did talk with them all, and I think what he sets down is perfectly true.

“What I was rather surprised to learn was that all this country was known as a gold country so long before the Klondike was heard of. Most people think that the Klondike strike brought the first stampedes into the Yukon Valley, but that is not the case at all. So I thought I would set this down, to have it straight

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when we all got older. As time goes by these things seem to get crooked, and sometimes men get credit who do not deserve it.

"Well, I have heard a good many stories about wild times in Dawson, but I have not any place to set that down here, nor to tell stories about getting rich quick. We only wanted to keep track of the early times in the wild country. So I guess this will do.

"Well, here we go, off for home!—On board the steamer *Norcom*, bound up the Yukon. Left at 9 P.M., after saying good-bye to all our friends in Dawson. We liked Dawson, but found it pretty quiet.

"*Sunday, August 17th.*—We are doing about five miles an hour. Current very swift. At noon saw the Stewart valley. Smith's store on the bank. Saw some boats stampeding for the White River strikes. Passed the mouth of the White River. Saw a new boat full of men turning up that river on the stampede. It must be like old times. Well, all right—we're going *out*.

"*Monday, August 18th.*—Slow plugging up the current. Made Selkirk, an old trading-post and mining hangout, at 2 P.M.

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The scenery here is much finer than on the Mackenzie. I don't know if tourists will ever come on any of these rivers. It goes a little slow.

"A good many wood-yards along the banks of the river. Quite a business selling wood to the steamboats, which burn a lot. They showed us the line where the winter dog-stages carry the mail to Dawson. Someoneshowed us the O'Brien cabin, where four murders were committed. One white man and three Indians were hanged for it.

"*Tuesday, August 19th.*—We all got up pretty early, although John was sleepy and Jesse a little cross. I told them we ought to see the boat line up through the Five-Finger Rapids. But, pshaw! there wasn't much about it. We could run these rapids, I am sure, in our canoe, with no danger at all. Of course, going up the current is stiff, so at the bottom of the chute the steamboat takes on a wire cable, and it winds around a drum with a donkey-engine, and that pulls the boat up the rapids. They are not much like some of the rapids we have seen.

"Well, it's twenty years since the

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Klondike rush, and we've been over a good deal of the country that the old-timers saw. Here we come to White Horse, and there we shall take the railroad over the Skagway Pass, where so many men had such awful times trying to get from the salt water into the Yukon Valley.

"I don't think I'll write any more notes, because when you get to a railroad everybody knows about it all anyhow. John and Jesse and I feel pretty blue, after all. Our trip is the same as done when we get to White Horse, and we are sorry. When we once know we can get home all safe, we sort of feel homesick for the rivers and mountains, too. You know how that is.

"I don't know that we would want to do it all over again, but we've had a fine time. I think John and Jesse are both a little taller. Uncle Dick says I am, too.

"But it will be fine to get home again. Uncle Dick says he is going to write and telegraph from White Horse once more. So good-bye to the Yukon. And good-bye to the Rat and the Mackenzie, too! Fine doings!"

XVII

WHAT UNCLE DICK THOUGHT

OUR party of explorers, who by this time felt entirely civilized, went about the streets of White Horse with a certain air of superiority over the individuals who had never been farther north than this railroad town. They were the heroes of the hour, with their tales of the Rat Portage, over which no party had come in in recent years, and each of them had to tell to many listeners the story of this or that incident of the long trail. Old graybearded men listened with respect to what these young boys had to say, and a newspaper man was very glad to make a copy of some of Rob's careful diary, which he now began to value more and more.

All too soon they were to leave this place and to pass up over practically the original Klondike trail which came from the salt water over the White Pass and down the headwaters of the Yukon to this point. They

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did not visit the once famous White Horse Rapids, where so many of the boats of the Klondikers came to grief, but declared it would only bore them, since they had seen waters so much more imposing! The local inhabitants laughed at this, but admitted that many of the teeth of this once dangerous water had been extracted since the early days.

As Rob had said, Uncle Dick took time here to do a little of his correspondence. He sent out a message by wire once more to the families of his companions, and to this added a letter which he said would go north to Valdez with the boys themselves, in case he himself received news at Skagway which would make it impossible for him to accompany them to their homes.

One letter he wrote to the company which had sent him as its representative into this northern country, in the following terms:

“GENTLEMEN,—I have arrived at the head of the rails on the Yukon to-day, completing the round from Edmonton to White Horse safely within the three months’ estimate handed you.

“I have investigated the transportation possibilities in much of this upper

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country. It is possible that a railroad north from Athabasca Landing might for a time prove profitable. I do not myself believe to any extent in the agricultural possibilities of that upper country. A few men will be able to subsist there. Some grain can be raised in many of the valleys of that upper country. The seasons are, however, so short, and the difficulties of permanent settlement so many, that while in my estimation the railroad would be a benefit for a time to a few individuals, it would not be a profitable permanent enterprise far to the northward of its present terminus. I regard the Peace River valley as about its permanent agricultural north, although many traders and boomers may dispute that.

"As to the feasibility of a railway line connecting the Yukon to the Mackenzie, I can see no reason whatever for contemplating the matter seriously. In my passage across the summit on the Rat Portage we found some squared timbers which had been prepared there with a view to laying a sort of tramway. The idea was long since abandoned by the Hudson's Bay Company, which once pur-

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posed it. I cannot say whether or not they intended to use steam transport. Since then the country has wholly lapsed into its original wild and bleak character. It is, in my opinion, and will and should remain, a wilderness. Its resources would not in any wise support any considerable transportation enterprise permanently.

"The companions who went with me on this trip report well and sound, and I commend them for the manner in which they withstood the hardships, at times very considerable.

"My subsequent and more complete report will be made at the offices of the Company at a later date.

"Respectfully submitted.

"RICHARD MCINTYRE."

The second letter was addressed to the mother of one of our young adventurers, and in this Uncle Dick wrote in rather less formal fashion:

"DEAR SISTER,—Here we are at the railroad, and within a couple of hours will be steaming out across the mountains for Skagway. All safe and sound. Never saw boys eat the way these do, and can-

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not say whether or not we will have enough money to get them home.

"Nothing much has happened since we left, as the cow-puncher said when he killed the ranch-manager in the owner's absence. We have made our trip around in two or three days' less time than I had estimated, but, looking back over it, I cannot say just how it all happened. We certainly have been busy traveling. In ninety days we will have finished what is estimated to be 5,280 miles, under all sorts of transport—steam, paddle, sail, and good old North American foot-work.

"The boys are all safe and sound, bigger and better than when I took them over, so I don't see what you can say against your erring brother after this.

"How did the youngsters behave? Well, I'll tell you when I see you. They were fine, and that's all about it. They send their love, and so do I, and some or all of us will see you with the first boat north from Skagway. Rob has a full diary, and John a good sketch map, so they'll be loaded for you all right.

"Do I renew my promise never to take them on another trip? Of course I re-

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member that *promise*, but can I manage to keep it, now that these chaps are such good travelers? I don't know. Well, suppose we talk that over when we meet again?

"From your affectionate brother

"DICK."

THE END

Hough, E.

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